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**[54] INFORMATION PROCESSING
METHODOLOGY**

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[51] Int. Cl. **H04H 1/40**

[52] U.S. Cl. **358/462; 358/448;**

358/453; 382/61; 382/48

[58] Field of Search **358/400, 401, 403, 447,
358/448, 449, 451, 452, 453, 460, 462, 463, 467,
470, 471, 474; 382/61, 48**

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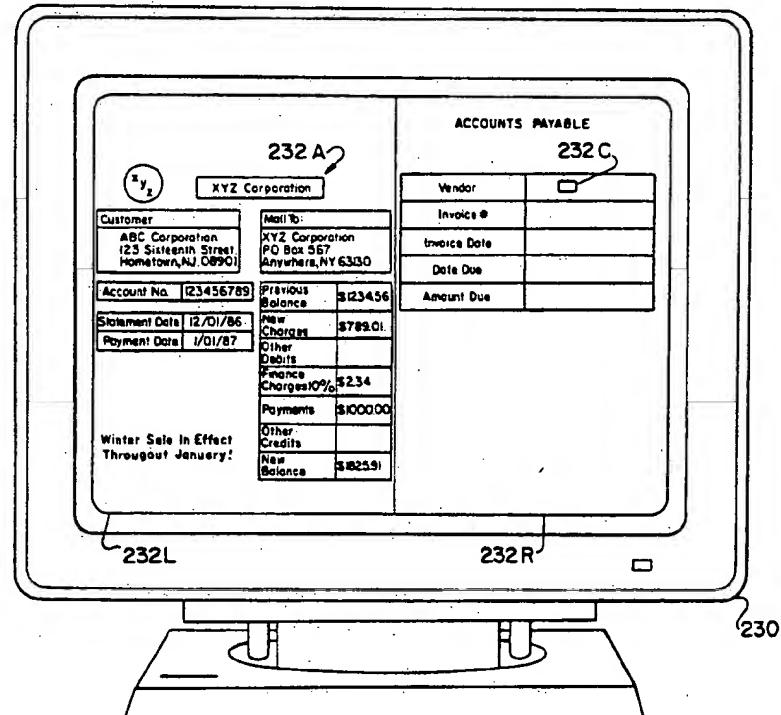
Assistant Examiner—Jerome Grant, II

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[57] ABSTRACT

An information processing methodology gives rise to an application program interface which includes an automated digitizing unit, such as a scanner, which inputs information from a diversity of hard copy documents and stores information from the hard copy documents into a memory as stored document information. Portions of the stored document information are selected in accordance with content instructions which designate portions of the stored document information required by a particular application program. The selected stored document information is then placed into the transmission format required by a particular application program in accordance with transmission format instructions. After the information has been transmission formatted, the information is transmitted to the application program. In one operational mode, the interface interactively prompts the user to identify, on a display, portions of the hard copy documents containing information used in application programs or for storage.

77 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



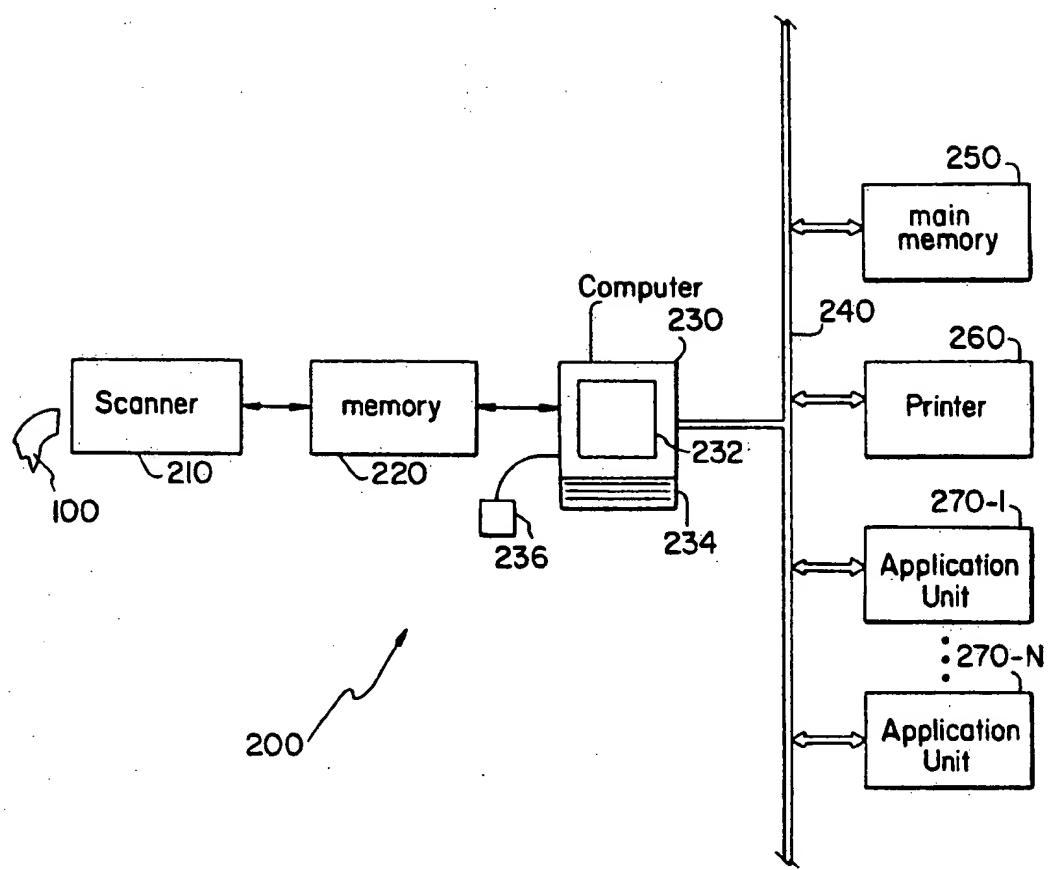


FIG. 1

x
y
z

20

XYZ Corporation

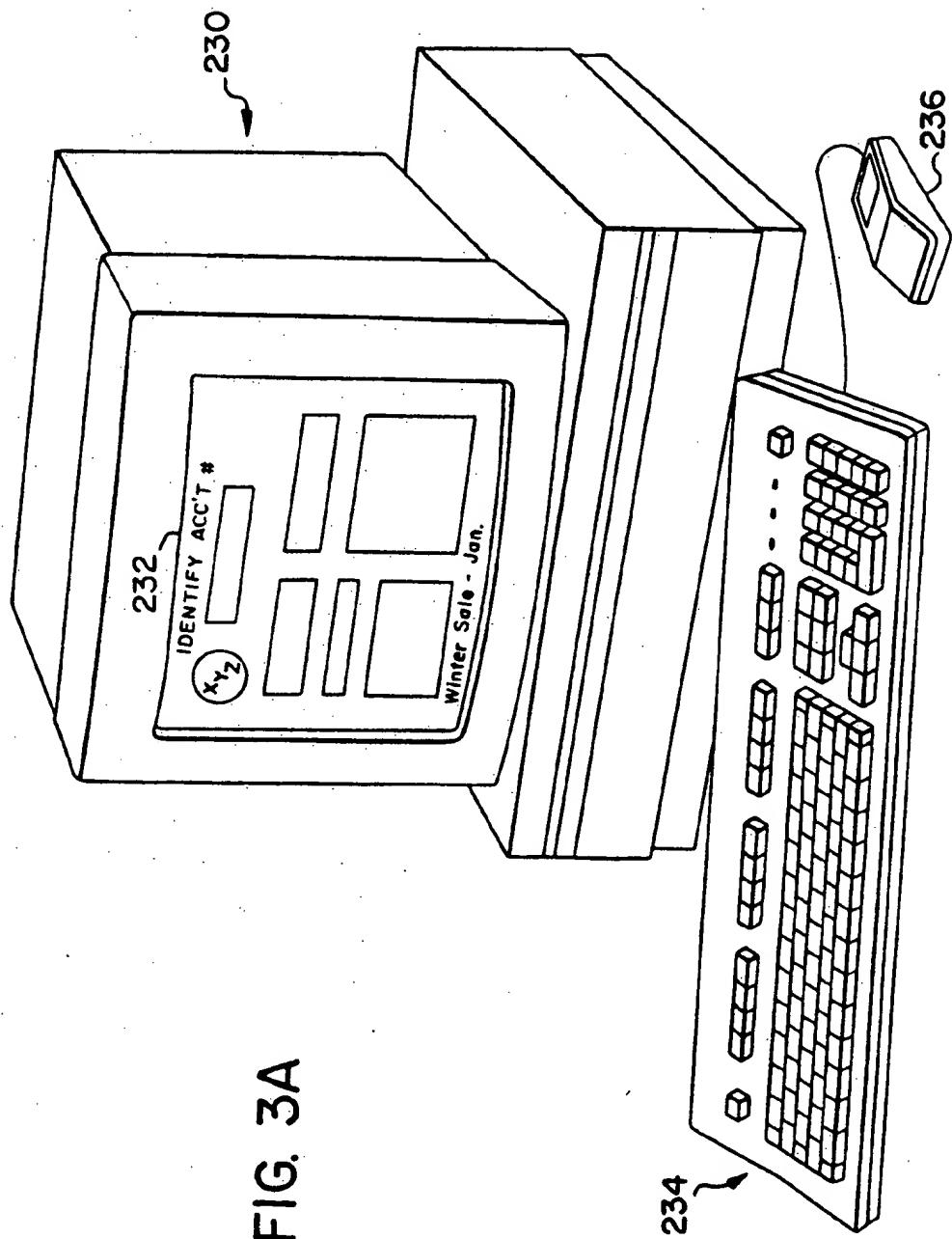
Customer	10	Mail To:	10
ABC Corporation 123 Sixteenth Street Hometown, NJ 08901	10	XYZ Corporation PO Box 567 Anywhere, NY 63130	10
10	10	10	10
Account Number	123456789	Previous Balance	\$1234.56
10	10	New Charges	\$789.01
Statement Date:	12/01/86	Other Debits	
Payment Date:	1/01/87	Finance Charges(10%)	\$2.34
10	10	Payments	\$1000.00
10	10	Other Credits	
10	10	New Balance	\$1025.91

10

30

Winter Sale In Effect Throughout January!

FIG. 2



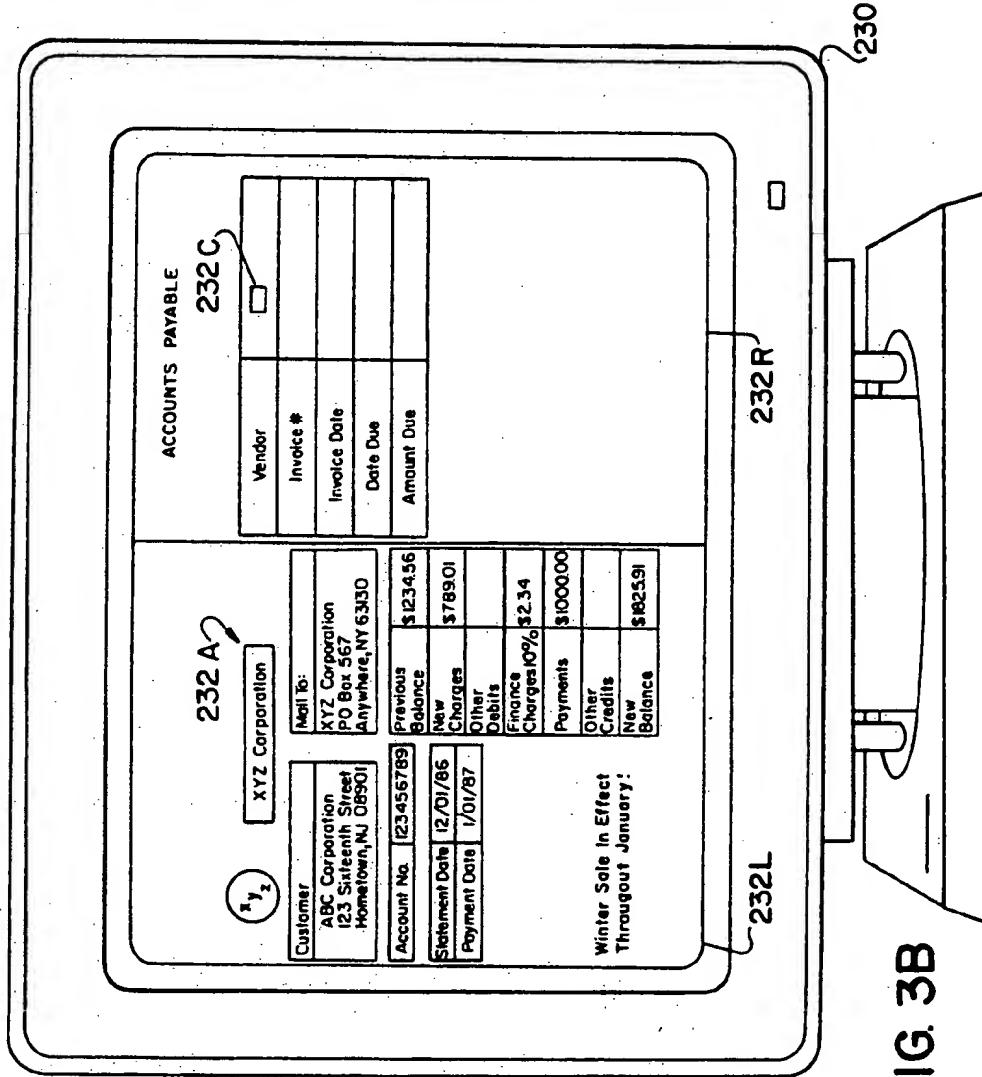


FIG. 3B

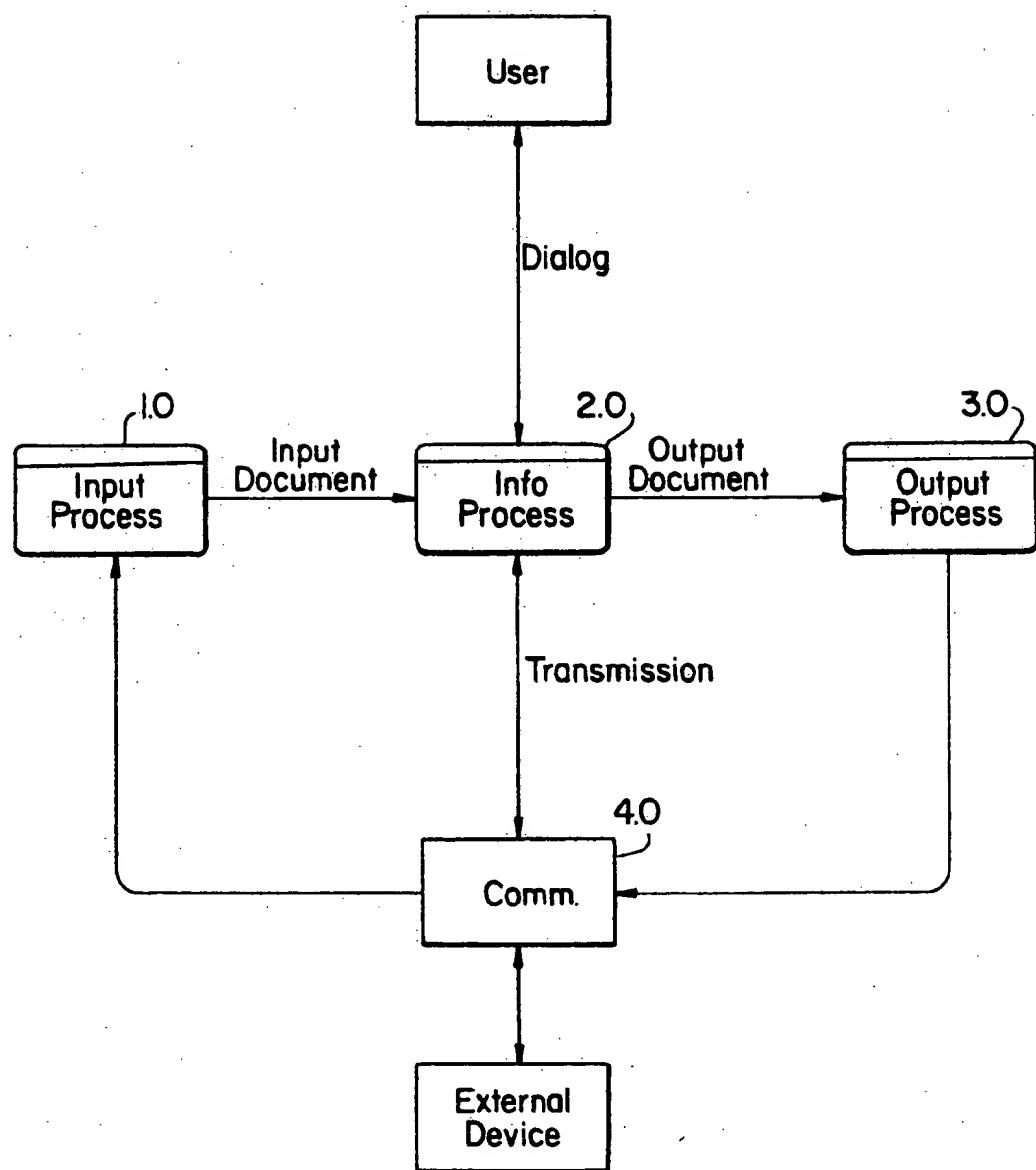


FIG. 4

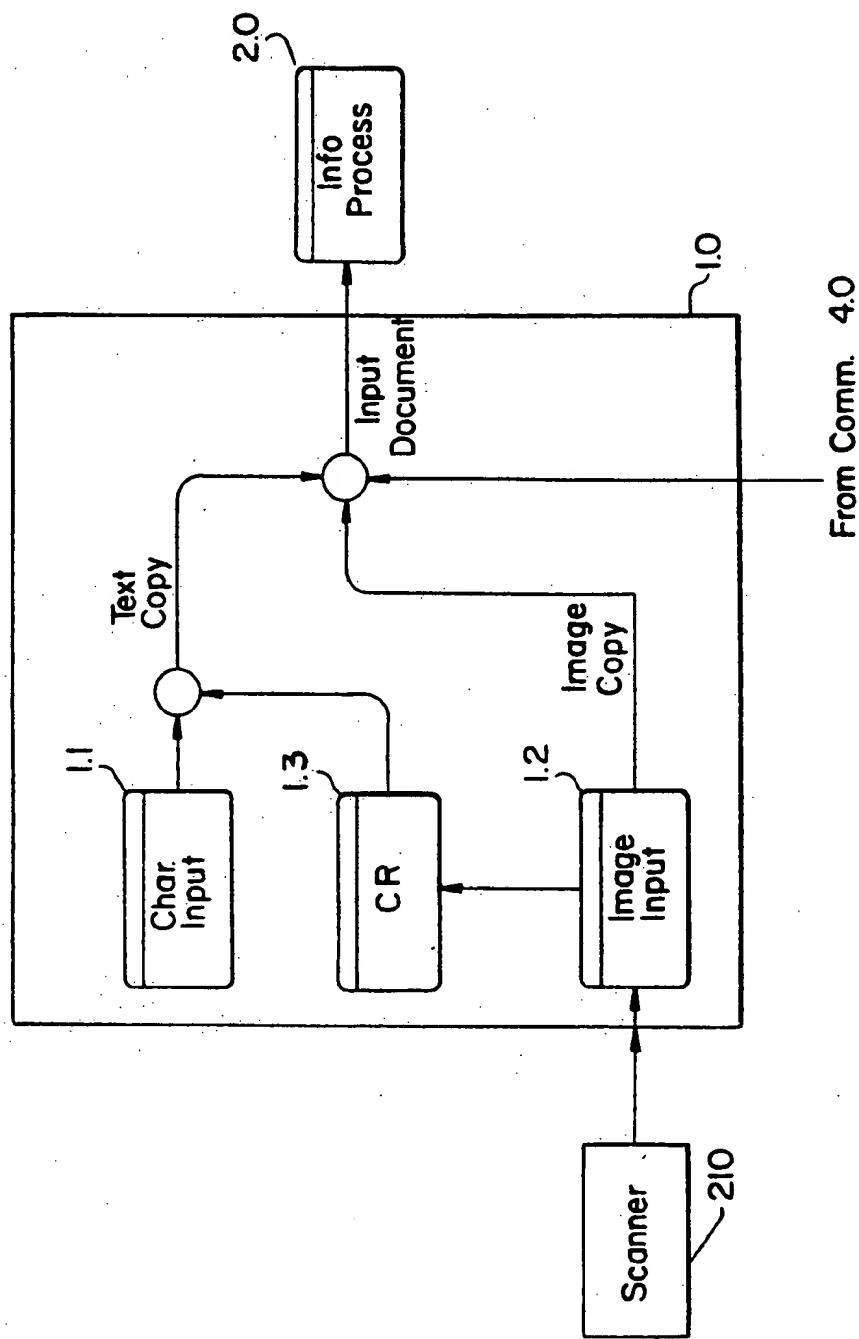


FIG. 5

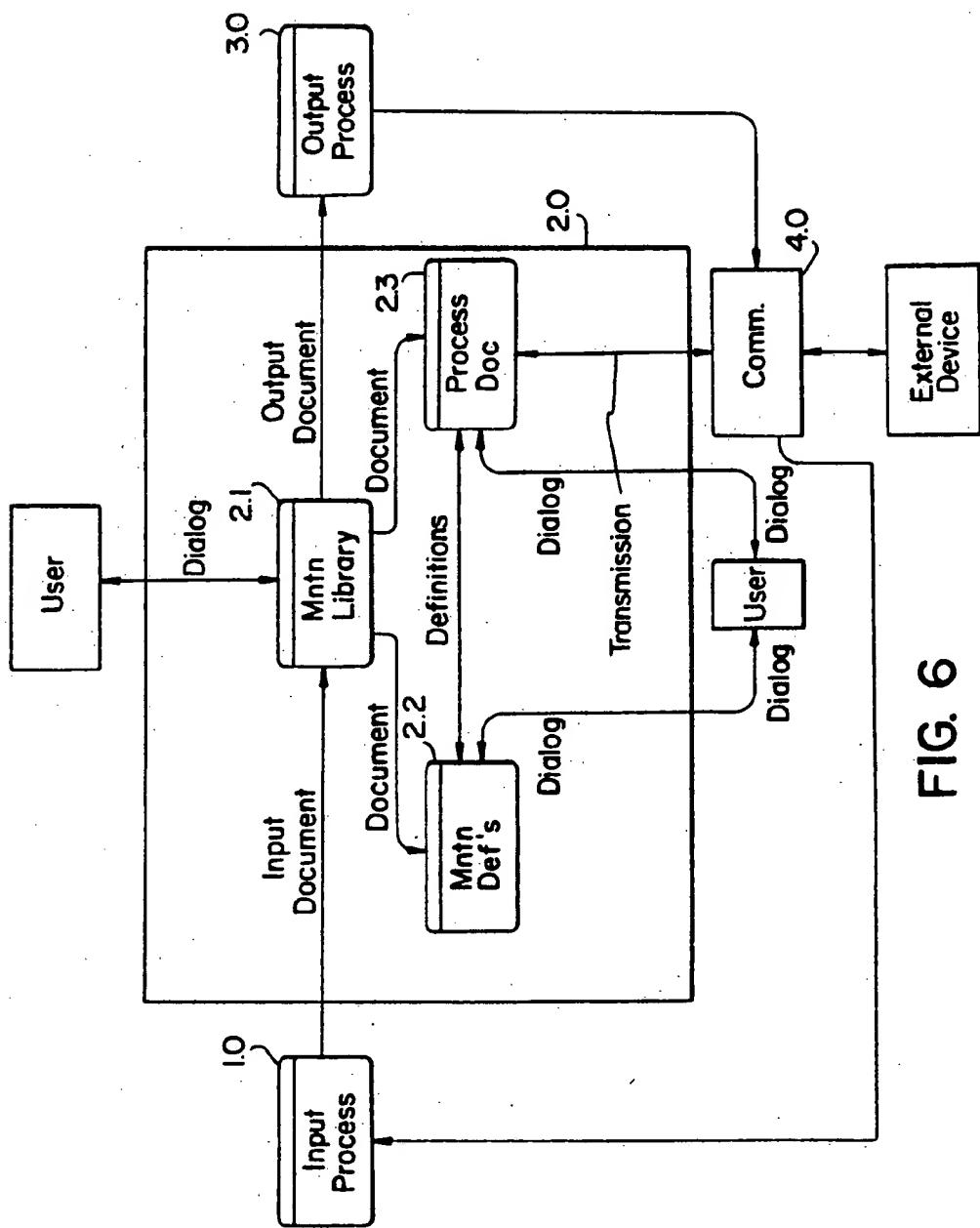


FIG. 6

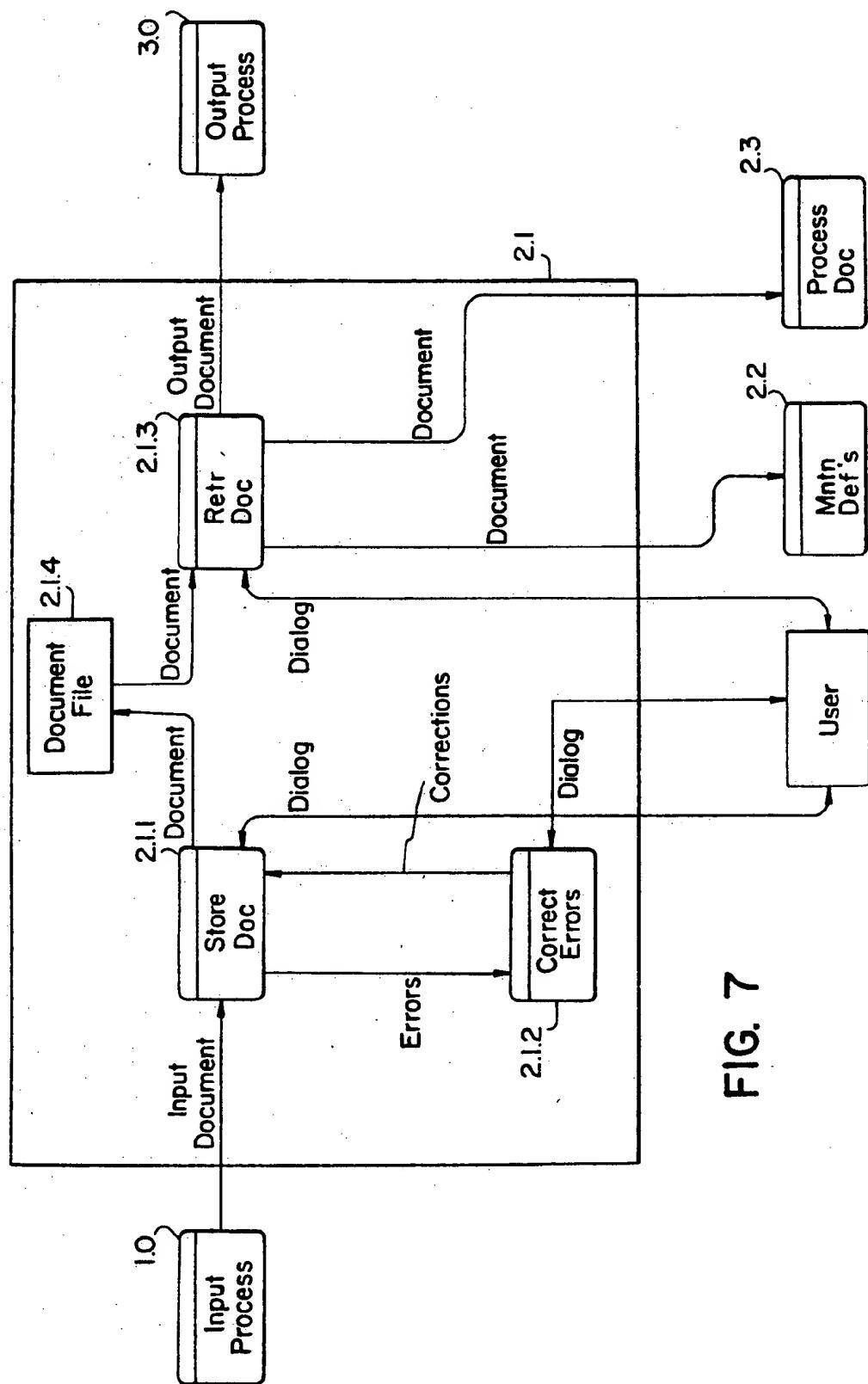


FIG. 7

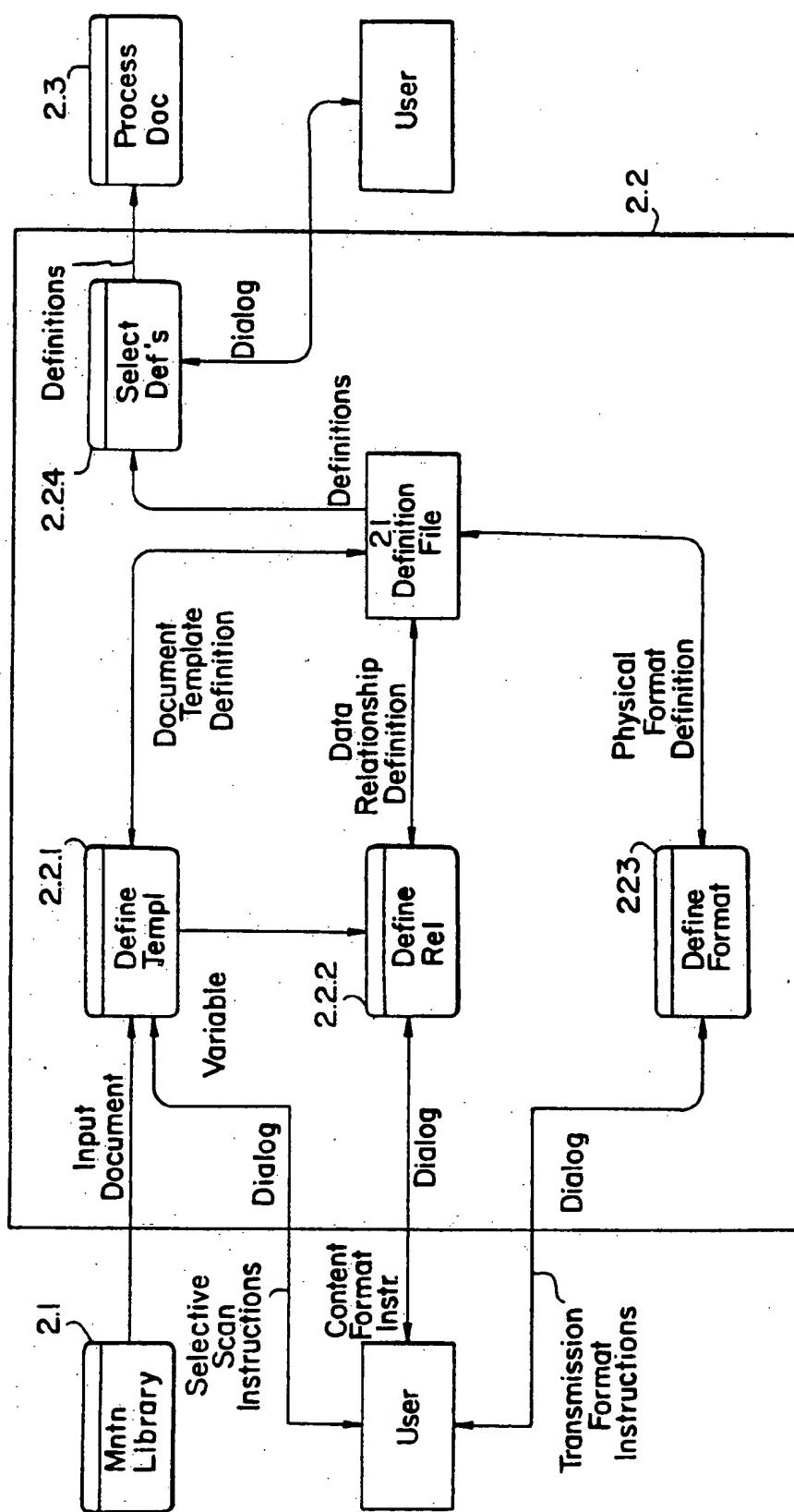


FIG. 8

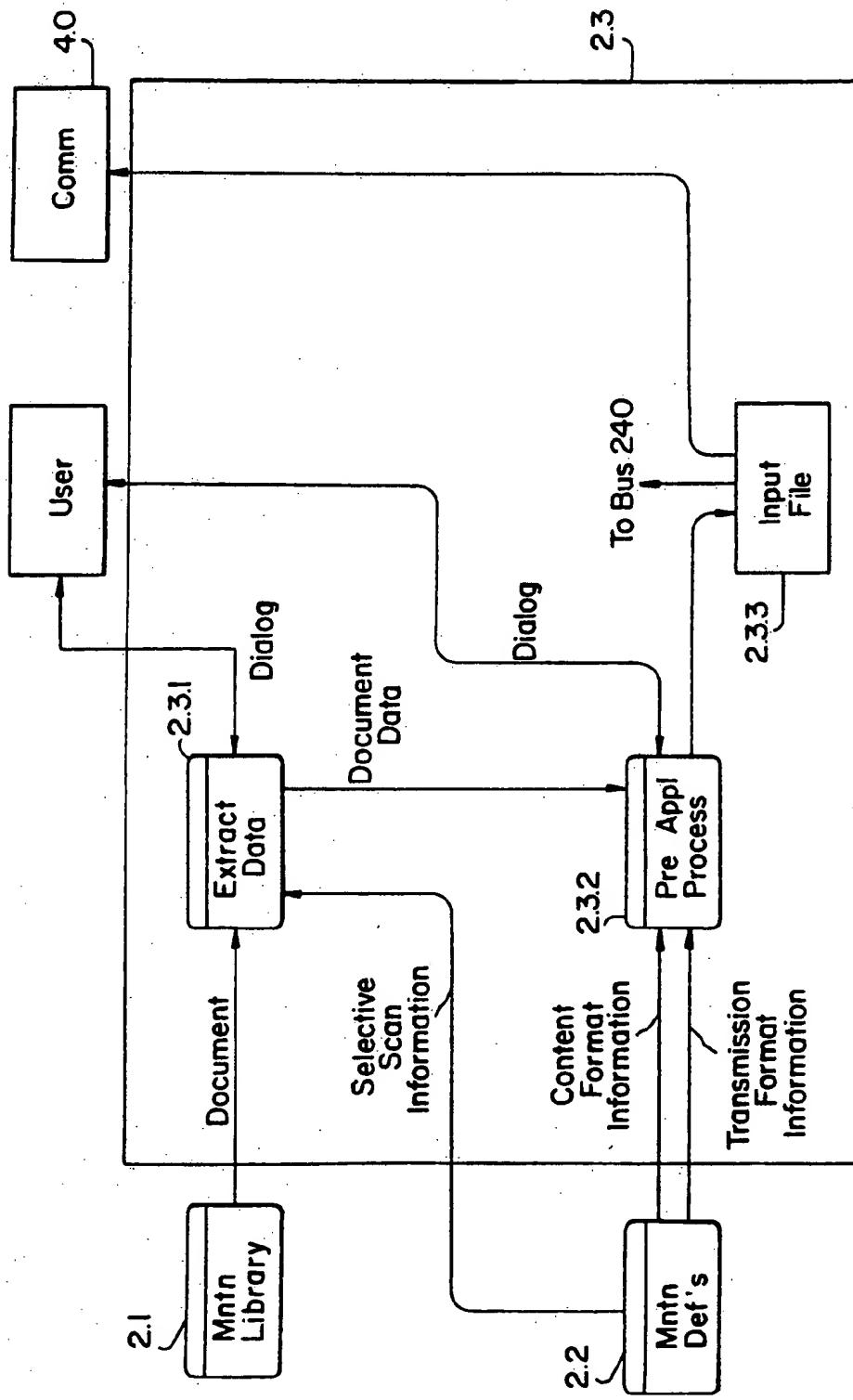


FIG. 9

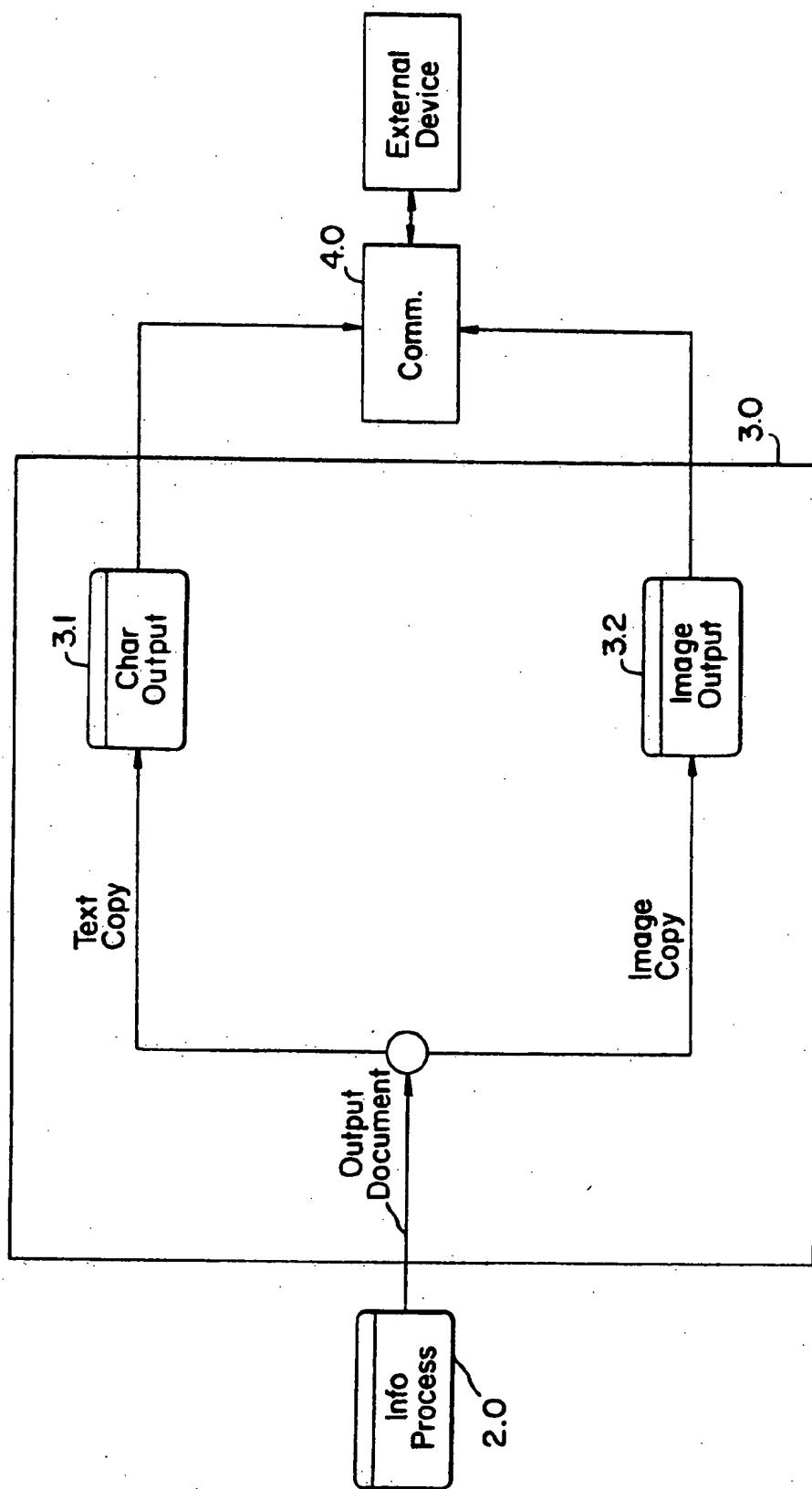


FIG. 10

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Value</u>
Vendor	XYZ Corporation
Heading 2	2
Mail To	XYZ Corporation
	PO Box 567
	Anywhere, NY 63130
Account Number	123456789
Statement Date	12/01/86
Payment Date	1/01/87
Previous Balance	\$1234.56
New Charges	\$789.01
Debits	
Finance Charges	\$2.34
Payments	\$1000.00
Other Credits	
New Balance	\$1025.91

FIG. II

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Value</u>
Vendor	XYZ Corporation
Account Number	123456789
Statement Date	12/01/86
Payment Date	1/01/87
Previous Balance	\$1234.56
New Charges	\$789.01
Debits	
Finance Charges	\$2.34
Payments	\$1000.00
New Balance	\$1025.91

FIG. 12A

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Value</u>
Mail To	XYZ Corporation PO Box 567 Anywhere, NY 63130
Previous Balance	\$1234.56

FIG. 12B

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Value</u>
Mail To	XYZ Corporation PO Box 567 Anywhere, NY 63130
Previous Balance	\$1234.56

FIG. 12C

```
>1>1>"XYZ Corporation"  
>2>2>25>+$123456789>  
>3>2>1>D12/01/86>  
>4>2>11>D12/15/86>  
>5>2>21>D01/01/87>  
>6>10>25>$1234.56  
>7>11>25>$789.01>  
>8>13>25>$2.34>  
>9>14>25>$1000.00>  
>10>16>25>$1025.91>
```

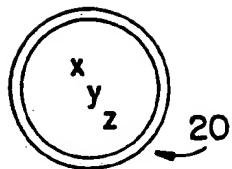
FIG. 13A

```
>1>1>1>$1234.56>  
>2>2>1>"XYZ Corporation"  
>3>3>1>"PO Box 567"  
>4>4>1>"Anywhere, NY 63130"
```

FIG. 13B

```
/1/1/1/$1234.56//  
/2/2/1/*XYZ Corporation*  
/3/3/1/*PO Box 567*  
/4/4/1/*Anywhere, NY 63130*
```

FIG. 13C



XYZ Corporation

Customer

ABC Corporation
123 Sixteenth Street
Hometown, NJ 08901

Mail To:

▲XYZ Corporation
PO Box 567
Anywhere NY, 63130▲

Account Number	123456789	Previous Balance	\$1234.56
Statement Date	12/01/86	New Charges	\$789.01
Payment Date	1/01/87	Other Debits	
		Finance Charges(10%)	\$2.34
		Payments	\$1000.00
		Other Credits	
		New Balance	\$1025.91

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FIG. 14

INFORMATION PROCESSING METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention is directed to a system for efficiently processing information originating from hard copy documents. More specifically, the invention is directed to a hard copy document to application program interface which minimizes the need to manually process hard copy documents.

In the past, information contained on hard copy documents was manually entered into a computer via the input controller of a particular computer. The original document was then filed away for future reference. Automatic input of data was limited to the input of Magnetic Ink Character Recognition (MICR) data and to Optical Character Recognition (OCR) data. This fixed-position data was forwarded directly to a dedicated computer application specifically designed to accommodate the input format. In more recent years, typewritten text has been mechanically inputted into a computer via a text file. Examples of this latter type of system are word processors and photo-typesetters.

These conventional systems have limitations which decrease the efficiency of processing information from a hard copy document. For example, the systems discussed above are limited in their application to MICR, OCR, or typewritten data. Parsing and processing data is limited to the particular requirements of the particular computer application which requires the input data. In addition, in these conventional systems, the actual hard copy document must be retained for future reference at great expense.

In a sophisticated computer network, different users may require different portions of the information contained on a hard copy document. For example, if the hard copy document is an invoice returned with payment of a bill, the accounting department may need all of the monetary information contained on the bill while the mailroom may need only customer address information, to update a customer's address. Therefore, there is a need for a system in which specific information from a hard copy document can be selectively distributed to various users.

Another problem with conventional systems is that users, even within the same company, may require that the information extracted from a hard copy document be transmitted to a particular application program in a specific transmission format. For example, one department in a company may use a particular application program which must receive information using a particular character as a delimiter and other departments may require the information in a different format using different delimiters.

Another problem, particularly for small businesses, is that current systems can not efficiently accommodate the inputting of information from a diversity of hard copy documents. A large business which receives many forms in the same format can afford a system which inputs a high volume of information in that format into memory. For example, it is cost-effective for a bank which processes hundreds of thousands of checks a month to buy a dedicated machine which can read information off of checks having a rigidly defined, or fixed, format. However, as the diversity of forms received by a business increases relative to the number of forms that must be processed, it becomes less cost-effective to design a dedicated machine for processing each

type of form format. This problem is particularly significant in small businesses which may, for example, receive fifty invoices a month, all in different, non-fixed, formats. It is frequently not cost-effective for a small business to design dedicated systems for inputting information in each of these various formats. This leaves a small business with no other practical alternative than to manually input the information off of each invoice each month.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention, therefore, to provide an application program interface which allows a user to select specific portions of information extracted from a diversity of hard copy documents and allows the user to direct portions of this information to several different users in accordance with the needs of the particular user.

It is also an object of the invention to provide a cost-effective system for inputting hard copy documents which can accommodate hard copy documents in a diversity of formats.

It is another object of the invention to provide an application program interface which allows a user to put information, which is to be transmitted, into a particular transmission format, based upon the needs of the receiver of the information.

It is a further object of the invention to provide an application program interface which will allow the extraction, selection, formatting, routing, and storage of information from a hard copy document in a comprehensive manner such that the hard copy document itself need not be retained.

It is another object of the invention to provide a system which reduces the amount of manual labor required to process information originating from a hard copy document.

A further object of the invention is to reduce the time required to process information originating from a hard copy document so that a higher volume of transactions involving hard copy documents can be processed.

The invention provides an application program interface which inputs a diversity of hard copy documents using an automated digitizing unit and which stores information from the hard copy documents in a memory as stored document information. Portions of the stored document information are selected in accordance with content instructions which define portions of the stored document information required by a particular application unit. Selected stored document information is then formatted into the transmission format used by the particular application program based on transmission format instructions. The transmission formatted selected stored document information is then transmitted to the particular application program. The hard copy documents may contain textual information or image information or both.

The interface operates in three different modes.

In a first mode, the interface extracts all of the information from hard copy documents and stores this information in memory. Parsing of various portions of the extracted information is performed in accordance with content instructions.

In a second mode, the user operates interactively with the interface by use of a display and an input device, such as a mouse. In this second mode, a hard copy document is inputted and displayed on the display. The

interface then prompts the user to identify the location of various information. For example, the interface can ask the user to identify the location of address information on the hard copy document. In response, the user positions the mouse to identify address information using a cursor. The identified information is then stored as address information in memory. Subsequently, the interface again prompts the user to identify other pieces of information, which are then stored in the appropriate locations in memory. This process proceeds until all of the information which is desired to be extracted off of the hard copy document is stored in memory.

In a third mode of operation, selected portions of information are extracted off of hard copy documents in accordance with predetermined location information which has been specified by the user. For example, the user can define a template which specifies the location of information on hard copy documents. Templates can be formed in conjunction with second mode operation. Alternatively, the user can instruct the interface to search hard copy documents for a particular character or symbol, located on the hard copy documents. The information desired to be extracted off of the hard copy documents is specified relative to the location of this character or symbol.

The interface can also prompt or receive from an applications program or another information processing system, required information, content instructions, and format instructions.

Other objects, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be described in further detail below with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates hardware for implementing a preferred embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 2 illustrates an example of a hard copy document containing information to be processed by the instant invention;

FIGS. 3A and 3B are enlarged views of the computer of FIG. 1 used to explain how the invention interactively prompts a user to identify information;

FIG. 4 is an overall data flow diagram for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment;

FIG. 5 is a detailed input data flow diagram for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment;

FIG. 6 is a detailed information processing data flow diagram for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment;

FIG. 7 is a more detailed information processing data flow diagram for the maintain library module of FIG. 6;

FIG. 8 is a more detailed information processing data flow diagram for the maintain definitions module of FIG. 6;

FIG. 9 is a more detailed information processing data flow diagram for the process document module of FIG. 6;

FIG. 10 is a detailed output data flow diagram for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment;

FIG. 11 lists data corresponding to the hard copy document of FIG. 2;

FIGS. 12A, 12B, and 12C illustrate examples of data which can be selected from the extracted data of FIG. 11 in accordance with content instructions;

FIGS. 13A, 13B, and 13C illustrate examples of the data of FIGS. 12A, 12B, and 12C formatted in accor-

dance with various transmission format instructions to form input files; and

FIG. 14 illustrates another example of a hard copy document containing information to be processed by the instant invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Hardware

The invention provides an interface between information originating from a hard copy document and a computer application unit which uses the information. The computer application unit can be a particular computer application program or a device which is controlled in accordance with instructions or information from the hard copy document. The invention also allows storing a copy of the hard copy document in a memory and retrieving the copy of the hard copy document. By providing a comprehensive and integrated system which can accommodate almost all of the possible uses of information contained on a hard copy document, the instant invention allows for a paperless office.

The invention includes hardware and software necessary to extract, retrieve, and process information from the hard copy document. A copy of the actual image of the hard copy document is stored in memory. Textual information extracted from the hard copy document is also stored in memory. Textual information is information, such as alphanumeric characters, which is recognized on the hard copy document and which is stored in a form which corresponds to the particular recognized character. For example, the extracted characters can be stored in the ASCII format in an electronic memory.

The user can have all of the information extracted from the hard copy document and stored in memory. Alternatively, the interface can interactively prompt the user to identify specific pieces of information for storage. The interface can also extract specific pieces of information using a predefined template. The interface can also prompt or receive from another information processing system or an applications program desired information, content instructions, and format instructions.

The instant invention also provides for parsing information extracted from the hard copy document and for directing this parsed information to specific users or application programs as an input file.

The invention also permits the user to define the transmission format of the input file for a particular computer application unit.

FIG. 1 illustrates hardware for implementing a preferred embodiment of a hard copy document to application program interface according to the instant invention. The interface 200 processes information extracted off of hard copy document 100 and provides information to application units 270 in a form required by each particular application unit. The interface extracts information off of a hard copy document 100 utilizing a scanner 210. The scanner 210 can be any type of scanner which extracts information off of hard copy documents, for example, an Optical Reader.

The scanned information is stored in a scanner memory 220 or in main memory 250, as will be described in greater detail below. If main memory 250 or another memory is available to store the scanned information, then scanner memory 220 can be omitted.

The information from scanner memory 220 or main memory 250 is transmitted to computer 230. In the preferred embodiment, computer 230 includes a display 232, a keyboard 234, and a mouse 236. The display 232 displays an image of the hard copy document itself and/or information necessary to process the information extracted off of the hard copy document.

The computer 230 is used to select portions of the stored document information contained in memory in accordance with content instructions which define portions of the stored document information required by an application unit. These content instructions may be provided by the application program. Alternatively, the content instructions can be inputted via an input device such as a keyboard, a touch screen, a mouse, a notepad, a voice recognition device, or the like.

The computer 230 is also used to format selected stored document information into the transmission format used by an application unit based on transmission format instructions. The transmission format instructions may be provided by the application program. Alternatively, the transmission format instructions can be inputted via a keyboard, a touch screen, a mouse, a notepad, a voice recognition device, or the like.

Thus, the computer 230 is used to generate an input file for a particular application unit. The computer 230 is connected to scanner memory 220, main, or permanent, memory 250, a printer 260, and application units 270, via a bus 240. Although FIG. 1 illustrates use of a bus to connect components together, it is understood that any routing or connecting link, implemented in hardware or software or both, can be employed instead of, or in addition to, a bus. Instructions to or in the computer 230 control the main memory 250, the printer 260, the application units 270, and the bus 240. Instructions to or in computer 230 can also control exchanges of information with scanner memory 220.

When the computer 230 generates an input file for a particular document, the computer 230 can send this input file directly to an application unit or can store this input file in the main memory 250 until required by an application unit. The main memory 250 may also optionally store a copy of the image information for the hard copy document and the textual information for the hard copy document. Thus, the image information and textual information from the hard copy document can be retrieved and printed out on printer 260. In addition, image and textual information stored in scanner memory 220 or in main memory 250 can be used to form additional input files at the time of input or at a later time, based on content instructions and transmission format instructions. Thus, the invention can, at the discretion of the user, eliminate the need to retain copies of hard copy documents, permitting a paperless office.

The application units 270 include particular application programs and devices which are controlled in accordance with information contained on hard copy document 100.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example of a hard copy document 100 which contains information to be processed by the instant invention. The document illustrated in FIG. 2 is a bill from XYZ Corporation to customer ABC Corporation. FIG. 2 is only an example of a type of document that can be processed by the instant invention.

In a first operational mode, the scanner 210 stores all of the information extracted off of hard copy document 100 in the scanner memory 220 or, alternatively, in main

memory 250. The extracted information is stored in two forms. The actual image of the hard copy document 100 is stored as image information in the scanner memory 220. In addition, the scanner memory 220 stores textual information recognized on the hard copy document 100 by, for example, employing standard character recognition software. In the preferred embodiment, the textual information is stored in ASCII format. The scanner memory 220 can be, for example, an electronic, magnetic, or optical memory.

FIG. 3A illustrates an enlarged view of the computer 230 of FIG. 1. This view will be used to describe a second mode of operation. In this second mode of operation, the hard copy document 100 is scanned and a copy of the document 100 is displayed on display 232 of computer 230, based on the contents of information temporarily stored in scanner memory 220. After the document is displayed on display 232, the computer 230 interactively prompts the user to identify the location of specific pieces of information on the hard copy document. In the FIG. 3A illustration, this prompt message is indicated as the message beginning with the arrow.

For example, the prompt message can ask the user to identify the location of account number information on the hard copy document. The user then uses an input device, such as keyboard 234 or mouse 236 or a touch screen, notepad, voice recognition device, or other input device to position a cursor on the display to identify the location of the information requested by the prompt message. For example, the cursor could be used to define a block (which could be highlighted) containing the requested information, followed by a mouse "enter" click. In this example, the user would move the mouse to identify the location of the account number information contained on the hard copy document 100. The computer 230 then stores the information which has been identified by the user as account number information in the appropriate address or subfile or as the appropriate variable or parameter in memory. The computer then prompts the user to identify the location of other information on the hard copy document, such as, statement date information. The process proceeds until all of the desired information has been stored into the appropriate locations in memory.

FIG. 3B illustrates a variation of the second mode for interactively prompting the user for information. In FIG. 3B, the display is split into two portions. A left-hand portion 232L displays the image of the hard copy document and a right-hand portion 232R displays the required application program information. For example, in FIG. 3B, portion 232R displays a spreadsheet used by an application program. While observing the split display, the user can input instructions to associate specific pieces of information on the hard copy document (for example, the vendor name indicated by the mouse arrow 232A) with particular subfiles in memory (for example, the vendor field next to which the cursor 232C appears), using a mouse or other input device(s) or both. The split display also allows the user to generate content format instructions while observing the information required for a particular application program on the right-hand portion.

These second modes of operation are efficient for small businesses which receive a small number of a wide variety of invoices, since the user does not necessarily have to store all of the information that appears on the hard copy document. A further advantage is that data input is quicker, easier, and more accurate than with

previous keyboard methodology. In addition, by specifying the location on the hard copy document of information, the user may optionally create a template, to be described in further detail below, for each different type of invoice. This template is stored for future use when another hard copy document in the same format is received.

More specifically, instructions from computer 230 can direct the scanner 210 and scanner memory 220; and/or main memory 250, to scan and/or store only specific portions of hard copy document 100. After the interactive prompts required to obtain information for a desired application program, the unused information stored in scanner memory 220 or 250 can be erased. Further, scanning of a second identical document can be limited to only those portions of the document which contain needed information.

More specifically, in FIG. 2, the lines 10 drawn around certain portions of the document represent the areas which the user has previously identified as the portions of a document to be extracted by the scanner 210 and stored in scanner memory 220 and/or main memory 250. Since the logo 20 and the message 30 have not been identified as an area to be scanned and stored, these areas are not scanned and stored in subsequent documents. Since the user has previously associated each of the areas 10 with a specific subfile of information, e.g., the account number, the scanned information is stored in memory locations corresponding to that subfile.

Data Processing

FIGS. 4-10 illustrate the flow of data in the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment. FIG. 4 illustrates the overall data flow for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment. The preferred embodiment includes an input process module 1.0, an information processing module 2.0, and an output processing module 3.0. The information processing module 2.0 is equipped to receive instructions from and transmit information to a user. The information processing module 2.0 can also transmit to and receive information from a remote external device through communication interface 4.0. Input process module 1.0 and output processing module 3.0 can also access communication interface 4.0. A module is implemented in hardware, software, or a combination of hardware and software. The specific implementation for a particular business application depends upon a variety of factors, for example, the relative costs of hardware and software implemented systems, the frequency with which a user will want to expand or modify the system, and the like.

FIG. 5 is a more detailed diagram of the input process module 1.0 of FIG. 4. The input process module 1.0 includes a character input module 1.1, an image input module 1.2, and, in the preferred embodiment, a character recognition device 1.3. The character input module inputs textual information, such as alphanumeric characters, from an input device such as keyboard 234. The image input module 1.2 inputs image information, for example, a digitized image of the actual appearance of hard copy document 100. Textual information can include textual input from an input device such as keyboard 234 and textual information extracted from the document by character recognition device 1.3. Both types of information comprise an input document which is transmitted to information processing module 2.0. In the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment, the processing per-

formed by input process module 1.0 occurs in scanner memory 220, computer 230, and main memory 250.

FIG. 6 illustrates information processing data flow for the FIG. 1 preferred embodiment, that is, FIG. 6 illustrates data flow in the information processing module 2.0.

The information processing module 2.0 includes a maintain library module 2.1, to be described in further detail below in conjunction with FIG. 7, a maintain definitions module 2.2, to be described in further detail below in conjunction with FIG. 8, and a process document module 2.3 to be described in further detail below in conjunction with FIG. 9.

The information processing module 2.0 is the module which coordinates and drives the entire system. In the preferred embodiment, the information processing module 2.0 is implemented primarily by computer 230.

FIG. 7 illustrates information processing data flow in the maintain library module 2.1. The maintain library module 2.1 maintains a library of image information, for example, a digitized image representing the actual appearance of the hard copy document, and textual information of the hard copy documents for reference during processing. This library can be incorporated within scanner memory 220, main memory 250, or another independent memory, for example, a RAM disk. The maintain library module 2.1 includes a store document module 2.1.1, a correct errors module 2.1.2, a retrieve document module 2.1.3, and a document file 2.1.4. These modules operate collectively to store, retrieve, and correct document information.

The store document module 2.1.1, prior to routing the document to the document file 2.1.4, may provide information on recognition errors which may have occurred while inputting the document. For example, the store document module 2.1.1 identifies that a character contained on hard copy document 100 was not recognized. The store document module 2.1.1 also optionally causes a copy of the document and its parsing to be displayed on the display 232 for confirmation by the user. The user may utilize this opportunity to identify any errors in the displayed document and, in conjunction with the correct errors module 2.1.2, to revise the document's parsing, if necessary, prior to storage of the document in memory. The module 2.1.1 also provides a facility for the user to name a particular hard copy document for cataloging, storage, and retrieval purposes. After the document is named, the store document module 2.1.1 stores copies of the document in the document file 2.1.4.

The correct errors module 2.1.2 processes instructions from the user to correct errors identified by the store document module 2.1.1 and errors that have been spotted by the user during the confirmation process.

The retrieve document module 2.1.3 permits the user to retrieve a copy of a document previously stored in the document file 2.1.4. As described above, long-term storage is provided by main memory 250, if necessary.

FIG. 8 illustrates a more detailed information processing data flow diagram for the maintain definitions module 2.2 of FIG. 6. The maintain definitions module 2.2 allows the user to define system and document parameters and maintains the definitions of these system and document parameters. The maintain definitions module 2.2 includes a define template module 2.2.1 which allows the user to specify the location of information on the document. This information provided by the user defines a template which is used to extract

information off the document and to associate the extracted information with a particular variable or subfile. These templates are illustrated by boxes 10 in the FIG. 2 example of a hard copy document. The maintain definitions module 2.2 can also access templates previously defined by the user and stored in main memory 250. Templates can also be provided as part of software packages developed by program developers.

The maintain definitions module 2.2 also includes a define relationships module 2.2.2. The define relationships module 2.2.2 allows the user to define data relationships, or logical relationships, between pieces of information extracted from the hard copy document. These pieces of information are then used to generate an input file for a selected computer application unit. The user defines these relationships by content instructions. Alternatively, content instructions to define relationships can be provided by application software. If the user provides these content instructions, the content instructions are inputted via keyboard 234 or via another input device such as a notepad, a voice recognition device, or the like. Examples of content instructions, data, and logical relationships will be described in further detail in conjunction with FIGS. 11 and 12A, 12B, and 12C.

The maintain definitions module 2.2 also includes a define format module 2.2.3. The define format module 2.2.3 allows the user to define transmission formats for an input file which is then transmitted to a selected computer application unit. Selection of the transmission format of the input file is accomplished by the user through use of transmission format instructions. Alternatively, the applications software itself can generate its own transmission format instructions. When the user must specify transmission format instructions, the transmission format instructions are inputted via keyboard 234 or via another input device such as a notepad, a voice recognition device, or the like. A further description of various transmission formats will be provided below in conjunction with FIGS. 12A, 12B, 12C, 13A, 13B, and 13C.

A select definitions module 2.2.4 is also included in the maintain definitions module 2.2. The select definitions module 2.2.4 allows the user to store and select a set of definitions to be used for processing the document. The definitions identify pieces of information on the document by, for example, absolute location, variable location, or relative location, or by proximity to key words and/or symbols. These definitions are described in further detail below by way of an illustrative example.

FIG. 9 illustrates a more detailed information processing data flow diagram for the process document module 2.3. The process document module 2.3 processes the document after the document has been stored in the system. The process document module 2.3 gathers the appropriate information which has been stored, and creates input file(s) 2.3.3 for the selected application unit. The process document module 2.3 then transmits the input file(s) via bus 240 and/or communication interface 4.0 to an application unit 270, an output device such as printer 260, or to main memory 250.

The process document module 2.3 includes an extract data module 2.3.1. This module extracts data off of the document in accordance with the user's instructions, for example, the user-defined template, or through the interactive mode.

The process document module 2.3 also includes a preapplication process module 2.3.2 which gathers and associates information extracted from the document in accordance with content instructions. This module prompts the user for any additional information required to satisfy the relationships defined by the content instructions. The preapplication process module 2.3.2 also places the selected information into the transmission format defined by the transmission format instructions.

The preapplication process module 2.3.2 also generates the input file 2.3.3 for the selected application in accordance with the appropriate instructions. The input file 2.3.3 is then transmitted to bus 240 and/or communication interface 4.0 for transmission to a particular application unit 270.

FIG. 10 illustrates a detailed output data flow diagram for output module 3.0. Output module 3.0 outputs a textual and/or image copy of the document. In the 20 FIG. 1 preferred embodiment, output module 3.0 is implemented by printer 260, associated software, and associated interface circuitry.

Operation

25 Examples of operation of a preferred embodiment will now be described.

The user enters the system by providing instructions to the information processing module 2.0. The user then instructs the information processing module 2.0 to conduct maintain library processing, maintain definitions processing, or process document processing.

If the user selects maintain library processing, the user then provides instructions to maintain or modify the document library through the maintain library module 2.1. For example, the user can direct the inputting and storage of a hard copy document 100 or can retrieve and output a document. The user requests inputting of a document through the store document module 2.1.1. The system then prompts the user to specify a storage location for the inputted document. The document is then read-in by the input process module 1.0. A textual copy and/or an image copy are stored into the document file 2.1.4. Errors which have occurred during inputting are identified and corrected by the correct errors module 2.1.2 and the user. The corrections are reflected in the document information stored in document file 2.1.4.

The retrieve document module 2.1.3 is used to retrieve and output a document. The system prompts the user to specify the storage location of a document and the type of document copy, for example, a textual or an image copy, to be outputted. The document is then outputted by the output process module 3.0.

If the user initially selected maintain definitions processing, the user would instruct the system to maintain and/or modify parameter definitions through the maintain definitions module 2.2. For example, the user can define and maintain a document template for extracting selected portions of information off of the hard copy document. The user can use the template to extract selected portions of information off of the hard copy document when the document is originally inputted, or alternatively, the user can use the template to identify selected portions of information for extraction off of an image copy of the document. In creating the template, the user identifies pieces of information on the document to be extracted and assigns a variable name, or subfile, to each piece of data.

The location of data to be extracted can be defined in a number of ways other than by use of a template. For example, the user can designate the absolute location of information on the document with respect to a grid overlaid on the document, e.g., always on line 3, starting in column i. The user can also identify information by specifying the relative location of information to be extracted, e.g., always two lines below the piece of data named "salutation", starting in column 3. The user can also specify the location of information to be extracted by variable location specification. For example, if the hard copy document is a letter, the module would conduct a key word search for the term "Dear Sir:". Wherever this term "Dear Sir:" is located, this piece of data would be associated with the variable specified by the user, for example, the variable "salutation." In addition, a defined set of conventional symbols can be used to signify certain recurring data items for the convenience of users of the instant invention. For example, a "@" symbol can be used to delineate the vendor name as follows: "@XYZ Corporation@". Other examples of the use of symbols to delineate information will be described with reference to FIG. 14.

The maintains definition module 2.2 is also used to maintain data relationships in accordance with content instructions and to maintain input file formats in accordance with transmission format instructions. Relationships are defined and maintained between pieces of data, specified by, for example, the names of variables, through the define relationships module 2.2.2. The names of pieces of data on the document are retrieved by, for example, the define template module 2.2.1, and are passed to the define relationships module 2.2.2. The user may then provide any additional pieces of data needed to generate an input file for a particular application program or unit, such as an input file line number. The user, the applications software, and/or instructions previously stored in memory then establishes the contents of the input file by defining relationships between pieces of data using content instructions. Specific examples of content instructions will be discussed below in conjunction with FIGS. 11, 12A, 12B, 12C, 13A, 13B, and 13C.

The user and/or the applications software defines and maintains the transmission format of the input file to be used by a particular application program or unit through the define format module 2.2.3 in accordance with transmission format instructions. This is accomplished by defining the parameters to be used by the preapplication process module 2.3.2 in generating an input file. Parameters which would typically be required to generate an input file would include the character type, e.g., text or pixel; delimiters used between pieces of data, e.g., a slash or a semicolon; end of line characters, e.g., a carriage return or a line feed; and end of file characters. Examples of transmission formats will be described in further detail below in conjunction with FIGS. 11, 12A, 12B, 12C, 13A, 13B, and 13C.

If the user initially selected process document processing, the interface will then proceed to process the document through use of the process document module 2.3. For example, the user can extract specific portions of data from an image copy of a document, can generate an input file for transmission to an application program, or can directly process information interactively with an application program.

If the user desires to extract specific portions of data from an image copy of a hard copy document which has

already been stored in memory, the user uses the extract data module 2.3.1 to identify a document to be processed. The document is then retrieved by the retrieve document module 2.1.3 and passed to the extract data module 2.3.1. The user can also select parameter definitions through the select definitions module 2.2.4.

The selected document template or parameter definition is passed to the extract data module 2.3.1. The extract data module 2.3.1 extracts pieces of data from the image copy of the document, as defined by the document template definition or the parameter definitions or both. This document data is then passed to preapplication process module 2.3.2.

The interface generates input file(s) 2.3.3 by use of the preapplication process module 2.3.2. The selected data relationship definition, as defined by the content instructions, and the selected record format definitions, as defined by the transmission format instructions, are passed to the preapplication process module 2.3.2. The preapplication process module 2.3.2 assembles the input file in accordance with the content instructions. The preapplication process module 2.3.2 also prompts the user for any additional pieces of data which need to be provided by the user. The input file is converted to the desired transmission format in accordance with the transmission format instructions. This physically formatted data is then stored in the input file 2.3.3.

The user can also use an application program to process information by loading the particular application program into the computer 230 rather than by sending the input file to a remote application unit 270.

An illustrative example of the processing described above will now be described.

The user inputs instructions via keyboard 234 or another input device which indicate that the user desires to input and store a document. The computer 230 then prompts the user for the name of the document. In this example, the user desires to input the document of FIG. 2 and therefore names the document "XYZ Corp. Bill Dec. 1, 1986." The computer then prompts the user to feed the hard copy document 100 into the scanner 210. The image of the hard copy document is displayed on display 232. The computer then prompts the user to identify the account number on the document. By use of the mouse 236 or other input device to position a cursor on the display, the user indicates the location of the account number. The account number is then read-in to a subfile named "Account Number." This process proceeds until all of the desired information has been read-in and stored.

In this particular example, no errors were encountered while inputting the document. The user then directs that the document be stored for future reference in a document file.

Some time later, the user desires to retrieve and output the document and to generate input files based on information from the document. The computer 230 prompts the user for the name of the document and the type of output. The user responds with "XYZ Corp. Bill Dec. 1, 1986" for a printed textual copy. The document is then retrieved from the document file and passed to the printer 260 for printing.

In order to generate an input file for a specific application program, the user selects the option to define a document template for use when each month's XYZ Corporation bill arrives. Accordingly, the user instructs the system to display a copy of an XYZ Corporation bill on the display 232. The user then identifies pieces of

data by absolute locations. That is, the user assigns specific names to information located at specific portions of the document. In this example, the user would input the following information:

Vendor-text, line 1, one line, column 1, 80 characters;
 Account number-numeric, line 6, one line, column 25, 9 characters;
 Statement date-date, line 9, one line, column 25, 8 characters;
 Payment date-date, line 11, one line, column 25, 8 characters;
 Previous balance-currency, line 7, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 New charges-currency, line 8, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 Other debits-currency, line 10, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 Finance charges-currency, line 12, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 Payments-currency, line 13, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 Other credits-currency, line 14, one line, column 75, 9 characters;
 New balance-currency, line 15, one line, column 75, 9 characters.

The user also identifies data with variable locations. In this particular example, a variable location is specified as follows:

Heading 2-line, value="Mail To:"

The identification of Heading 2 as line information means that the system will search for occurrences of the character string "Mail To:" and assign the line number which contains this character string to Heading 2.

The user also identifies data by relative locations. In this example, the user identifies the following relative location:

Mail To-text, Heading 2+1, 3 lines, column 60, 25 characters per line.

The instructions above instruct the system to assign the textual information beginning on one line after Heading 2 and continuing for 3 lines, in column 60, to the Mail To subfile.

As an alternative to inputting the actual line, column, and character numbers, the user can identify desired portions of the document by blocking, or highlighting, the desired portions using the mouse or other input device. In this case, the computer converts the highlighted portions into corresponding line, column, and character numbers.

FIG. 11 lists data corresponding to the hard copy document of FIG. 2 and the associated variable or subfile names.

Next, the user desires to define data relationships in accordance with content instructions. Examples of the type of contents which can be specified by a user are illustrated in FIGS. 12A, 12B, and 12C.

In this particular example, three separate departments of ABC Corporation require information from the XYZ Corporation bill. The first department requires vendor, account number, statement date, payment date, previous balance, new charges, debits, finance charges, payments, and new balance information. The second and third departments require mail to information and previous balance information. Each of these departments have their own application program which utilizes this information.

The user employs content instructions to designate how pieces of information, which have been extracted

off of hard copy document 100, are directed to particular departments, that is, particular application programs. FIG. 12A illustrates the contents of the information to be transmitted to the first department. FIG. 12B illustrates the information to be transmitted to the second department. FIG. 12C illustrates the information to be transmitted to the third department. The content instructions, therefore, parse the information shown in FIG. 11 to various application programs, as shown by FIGS. 12A, 12B, and 12C. Content instructions can also be used to identify additional pieces of data which are required for the input files of the particular application programs. In this particular example, the specific application programs from the three departments all require numeric record number information, numeric horizontal position information, numeric vertical position information, and date received information. The horizontal and vertical position information is used by the application program to specify the location of the received information on a spreadsheet application program, in this example. The user may know in advance the content format required by each application program, that is, in this example, the location and type of information specified on the spreadsheet. The user may also employ the split display mode described with reference to FIG. 3B to generate content format instructions.

Using the content instructions, the user establishes the following contents for the input file corresponding to FIG. 12A:

Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, vendor;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, account number;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, statement date;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, date received;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, payment date;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, previous balance;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, new charges;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, finance charges;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, payments;
 Record number, horizontal position, vertical position, new balance.

Next, transmission format instructions are employed to define the transmission format of the input file for a specific application program or unit. FIG. 13A illustrates the transmission input file corresponding to FIG. 12A. FIG. 13B illustrates the transmission input file corresponding to FIG. 12B. FIG. 13C illustrates the transmission input file corresponding to FIG. 12C. A comparison of FIGS. 12B and 12C reveals that FIGS. 12B and 12C have the same contents. However, the information illustrated in FIG. 12B is being sent to a different application program than the information in FIG. 12C. These application programs require different transmission input formats, as illustrated in FIGS. 13B and 13C. More specifically, the application program that receives the input file illustrated in FIG. 13B uses the greater than sign as a delimiter whereas the application program which receives the transmission input file shown in FIG. 13C uses a back-slash as the delimiter.

After the contents and the transmission format for the input file have been defined, and any additional information has been inputted, the input file is assembled and transmitted to the particular application program.

FIG. 14 illustrates another example of a hard copy document containing information to be processed by the instant invention. The hard copy document illustrated in FIG. 14 is first scanned and information from the hard copy document is stored into a memory. The interface 200 then identifies portions of the hard copy document corresponding to various variables by recognizing a defined set of symbols. In the FIG. 14 example, triangles delineate the mailing address, circles delineate the statement date, and squares delineate the new charges. Information from these portions of the hard copy document is stored in the corresponding memory locations or subfiles for each variable. The same set of symbols can be used to identify the same information from one document to the next. Thus, even if the physical formats of documents are not fixed from one document to the next, a diversity of hard copy documents can be processed without manually inputting data by recognition of the defined symbols.

Examples of readily available application programs are Quicken and Lotus 1, 2, 3 both of which are widely utilized in the business community. Quicken, for example is an easy-to-utilize program for writing checks and preparing business records. Payee, amount and address information may readily be transmitted from scanner memory 220 and/or main memory 250 to the Quicken application program for check writing functions and ledger keeping purposes. Lotus is a well known spreadsheet program which may process data input into specified cells once this data is placed in conventional Lotus format.

Thus, the instant invention provides an integrated and comprehensive system for handling information from a hard copy document, thus permitting a paperless office. In addition, the invention permits data, extracted off of a hard copy document, to be easily manipulated into various logical and transmission formats required by a particular application unit. The invention also provides a low cost system for inputting information from a wide variety of hard copy documents into a memory.

The foregoing description has been set forth merely to illustrate preferred embodiments of the invention and is not intended to be limiting. Modifications are possible without departing from the scope of the invention.

For example, letters, checks, forms, pictures, reports, music scores, film, and other types of hard copy documents can be processed by the invention for accounts payable/receivable accounting, inventory control, record keeping, budgeting, data base management, music transcription, forms processing, computerized art, survey and questionnaire processing, statistical data analysis, correspondence processing and other applications.

Other automated digitizing units can be used in addition to or as an alternative to use of the scanner 210 as an input unit. Any electrical, magnetic, or optical device which extracts information off of a hard copy document, thereby eliminating the need to manually input significant amounts of information from the hard copy document is suitable for use as an automated digitizing unit. In addition, information can be input by user responses and digital and analog signals generated from various devices, and from computer files from other computer systems. Suitable hardware for inputting data

includes a keyboard, a light pen, a mouse, a touch screen, a laser scanner, a microphone, a tablet, a disk drive, a magnetic tape drive, and a modem.

The interface 200 can also output information in forms other than a hard copy of textual or image information. For example, the interface 200 can output system responses, computer files, and digital and analog signals for transmission to other computer systems or to control systems. Suitable hardware for outputting information includes a disk drive, a magnetic tape drive, a cathode ray tube, a plasma screen, a printer, a plotter, a film developer, an amplifier, and a modem.

Since modifications of the described embodiments incorporating the spirit and substance of the invention may occur to persons skilled in the art, the scope of the invention should be limited solely with respect to the appended claims and equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of processing information from a diversity of types of hard copy documents, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving output representing a diversity of types of hard copy documents from an automated digitizing unit and storing information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents into a memory, said information not fixed from one document to the next, said receiving step not preceded by scanning, via said automated digitizing unit, of a separate document containing format requirements;

(b) recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a first data field; and

(c) storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field into memory locations for said first data field.

2. A method as set forth in claim 1, wherein step (b) includes prompting identification of said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field.

3. A method as set forth in claim 1, wherein step (c) includes storing textual information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field into said memory locations for said first data field.

4. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising the steps of detecting and correcting errors resulting from automated digitizing.

5. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising the step of utilizing a template to associate portions of said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

6. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

7. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a relative location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

8. A method as set forth in claim 1, wherein step (b) includes displaying an image of a hard copy document on a display based on a contents of said memory.

9. A method as set forth in claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a second data field, said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said

second data field being different from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field; and

storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into memory locations or said second data field.

10. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a second data field, said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field being different from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field; and

storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into memory locations for said second data field.

11. A method as set forth in claim 10, further comprising the step of storing image information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into said memory locations for said second data field.

12. A method as set forth in claim 10, further comprising the step of storing textual information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into said memory locations for said second data field.

13. A method as set forth in claim 10, further comprising the step of prompting identification of said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field.

14. A method of processing information from a diversity of types of hard copy documents, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) scanning a diversity of types of had copy documents and storing information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents into a memory, said information not fixed from one document to the next, said scanning not preceded b scanning of a separate document containing format requirements;

(b) recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a first data field; and

(c) storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field into memory locations for said first data field.

15. A method as set forth in claim 14, further comprising the steps of detecting and correcting errors resulting from said scanning.

16. A method as set forth in claim 14, further comprising receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a relative location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

17. A method as set forth in claim 14, further comprising receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

18. A method as set forth in claim 14, further comprising the step of utilizing a template to associate portions of said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

19. A Method as set forth in claim 14, wherein step (c) includes storing textual information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field into said memory locations for said first data field.

20. A method as set forth in claim 14, wherein step (b) includes prompting identification of said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field.

21. A method as set forth in claim 14, wherein step (b) includes displaying an image of a hard copy document on a display based on a contents of said memory.

22. A method as set forth in claim 21, further comprising the steps of:

recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a second data field, said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field being different from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field; and

storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into memory locations for said second data field.

23. A method as set forth in claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

recognizing portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to a second data field, said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field being different from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said first data field; and

storing information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into memory locations for said second data field.

24. A method as set forth in claim 23, further comprising the step of storing image information from said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into said memory locations for said second data field.

25. A method as set forth in claim 23, further comprising the step of storing textual information from aid portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field into said memory locations for said second data field.

26. A method as set forth in claim 23, further comprising the step of prompting identification of said portions of said hard copy documents corresponding to said second data field.

27. A method of processing data extracted from a diversity of types of hard copy documents, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving output representing a diversity of types of hard copy documents from an automated digitizing unit and storing information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents into a memory as stored document information, said receiving step not preceded by scanning, via said automated digitizing unit, a separate document containing format requirements;

(b) recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit;

(c) formatting said selected portions of said stored document information into a transmission format used by said application unit; and

(d) transmitting said formatted selected portions of said stored document information to said application unit.

28. A method as set forth in claim 27, further comprising the step of printing textual copies of said hard copy documents based on said stored document information.

29. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes receiving output representing a diversity of types of hard copy documents from a scanner.

30. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a relative location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

31. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

32. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes the step of utilizing a template to associate portions of said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

33. A method as set forth in claim 27, further comprising detecting and correcting errors in said stored document information resulting from automated digitizing.

34. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes storing textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

35. A method as set forth in claim 27, wherein step (a) includes storing digitized image information representing the actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

36. A method as set forth in claim 35, further comprising the step of printing copies of said hard copy documents based on said digitized image information.

37. An application program interface, comprising: an automated digitizing unit which extracts information from a diversity of types of hard copy documents and stores said information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents in a memory as stored document information;

a processor recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit, said processor operative without reference to information extracted, via said automated digitizing unit, from a separate document containing format requirements;

a formatter formatting said selected portions of said stored document information into a transmission format used by said application unit; and

an output unit transmitting said formatted selected portions of said stored document information to said application unit.

38. An interface as set forth in claim 37, wherein said automated digitizing unit includes a scanner.

39. An interface as set forth in claim 37, further comprising a search unit for searching for at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

40. An interface as set forth in claim 37, further comprising:

a template definition unit for defining a template which associates locations on said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

41. An interface as set forth in claim 37, further comprising an error correcting unit detecting and correcting errors resulting from extracting by said automated digitizing unit.

42. An interface as set forth in claim 37, wherein said stored document information includes textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

43. An interface as set forth in claim 37, wherein said stored document information includes digitized image information representing an actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

44. An interface as set forth in claim 43, further comprising a printer which prints out copies of an actual appearance of said hard copy documents based on said digitized image information.

45. A method of processing data extracted from a diversity of types of hard copy documents, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving output representing a diversity of types of hard copy documents from an automated digitizing unit and storing information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents into a memory as stored document information, said receiving step not preceded by scanning, via said automated digitizing unit, of a separate document containing format requirements;

(b) recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit; and

(c) transmitting said selected portions of said stored document information to said application unit.

46. A method as set forth in claim 45, wherein step (a) includes storing textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

47. A method as set forth in claim 45, further comprising detecting and correcting errors in said stored document information resulting from automated digitizing.

48. A method as set forth in claim 45, wherein step (a) includes the step of utilizing a template to associate portions of said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

49. A method as set forth in claim 45, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

50. A method as set forth in claim 45, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a relative location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

51. A method as set forth in claim 45, further comprising the step of printing textual copies of said hard copy documents based on said stored document information.

52. A method as set forth in claim 45, wherein step (a) includes storing digitized image information representing an actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

53. A method as set forth in claim 52, further comprising the step of printing copies of said hard copy documents based on said digitized image information.

54. An application program interface, comprising:
 an automated digitizing unit which extracts information from a diversity of types of hard copy documents and stores said information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents in a memory as stored document information;
 a processor recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit, said processor operative without reference to information extracted, via said automated digitizing unit, from a separate document containing format requirements; and
 an output unit transmitting said selected portions of said stored document information to said application unit.

55. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, wherein said automated digitizing unit includes a scanner.

56. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, further comprising a search unit for searching for at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

57. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, further comprising a template definition unit for defining a template which associates locations on said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

58. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, further comprising an error correcting unit detecting and correcting errors resulting from extracting by said automated digitizing unit.

59. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, wherein said stored document information includes textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

60. An application program interface as set forth in claim 54, wherein said stored document information includes digitized image information representing an actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

61. An application program interface as set forth in claim 60, further comprising a printer which prints out copies of an actual appearance of said hard copy documents based on said digitized image information.

62. A method of processing data extracted from a diversity of types of hard copy documents, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) receiving output representing a diversity of types of hard copy documents from an automated digitizing unit and storing information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents into a memory as stored document information, said receiving step not preceded by scanning, via said automated digitizing unit, a separate document containing format requirements;

(b) recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit; and

(c) formatting said selected portions of said stored document information into a transmission format used by said application unit.

63. A method as set forth in claim 62, further comprising the step of printing textual copies of said hard copy documents based on said stored document information.

64. A method as set forth in claim 62, wherein step (a) includes storing textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

65. A method as set forth in claim 62, wherein step (a) includes storing digitized image information representing an actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

66. A method as set forth in claim 62, further comprising detecting and correcting errors in said stored document information resulting from automated digitizing.

67. A method as set forth in claim 62, wherein step (a) includes the step of utilizing a template to associate portions of said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

68. A method as set forth in claim 62, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

69. A method as set forth in claim 62, wherein step (a) includes receiving instructions identifying at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a relative location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

70. An application program interface, comprising:
 an automated digitizing unit which extracts information from a diversity of types of hard copy documents and stores said information from said diversity of types of hard copy documents in a memory as stored document information;

a processor recognizing and selecting portions of said stored document information corresponding to data fields required by an application unit, said processor operative without reference to extracted information scanned, via said automated digitizing unit, of a separate document containing format requirements; and

a formatter formatting said selected portions of said stored document information into a transmission format used by said application unit.

71. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, wherein said stored document information includes textual information representing characters on said hard copy documents.

72. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, further comprising an error correcting unit detecting and correcting errors resulting from extracting by said automated digitizing unit.

73. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, further comprising a template definition unit for defining a template which associates locations on said hard copy documents with specific data fields.

74. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, further comprising a search unit for searching for at least one character or symbol, located on said hard copy documents, which identifies a location on said hard copy documents containing data corresponding to a specific data field.

75. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, wherein said automated digitizing unit includes a scanner.

76. An application program interface as set forth in claim 70, wherein said stored document information includes digitized image information representing an actual appearance of said hard copy documents.

77. An application program interface as set forth in claim 76, further comprising a printer which prints out copies of an actual appearance of said hard copy documents based on said digitized image information.

* * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 5,258,855
DATED : November 2, 1993
INVENTOR(S) : Robert LECH et al.

Page 1 of 2

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 10, line 41, "read-in" should be --read in--.

Column 11, line 24, "maintains" should be --maintain--.

Column 16, line 27, Claim 1, "b" should be --by--, line 48, Claim 5, "sep" should be --step--.

Column 17, line 1, Claim 9, "potions" should be --portions--, line 6, Claim 9, "or" should be --for--, line 13, Claim 10, "potions" should be --portions--, line 38, Claim 14, "had" should be --hard--, line 42, Claim 14, "b" should be --by--.

Column 18, line 1, Claim 19, "Method" should be --method--, line 31, Claim 23, "potions" should be --portions--,

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 5,258,855
DATED : November 2, 1993
INVENTOR(S) : Robert LECH et al.

Page 2 of 2

It is certified that error appears in the above-indentified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

line 44, Claim 25, "aid" should be --said--.

Signed and Sealed this
Twelfth Day of July, 1994

Attest:



BRUCE LEHMAN

Attesting Officer

Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks



US005864827A

United States Patent [19]

Wilson

[11] Patent Number: 5,864,827
[45] Date of Patent: Jan. 26, 1999

[54] SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AN INFORMATION GATEWAY

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[73] Assignee: Belzberg Financial Markets & News International Inc., Toronto, Canada

[21] Appl. No.: 883,739

[22] Filed: Jun. 27, 1997

[51] Int. Cl. 6 G06F 17/00

[52] U.S. Cl. 705/35; 345/329; 395/200.48; 395/700.47

[58] Field of Search 705/1, 10, 35, 705/36, 37, 39; 345/329, 331, 335; 395/200.3, 200.33, 200.47, 200.48, 200.49, 200.57, 200.61

[56] References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

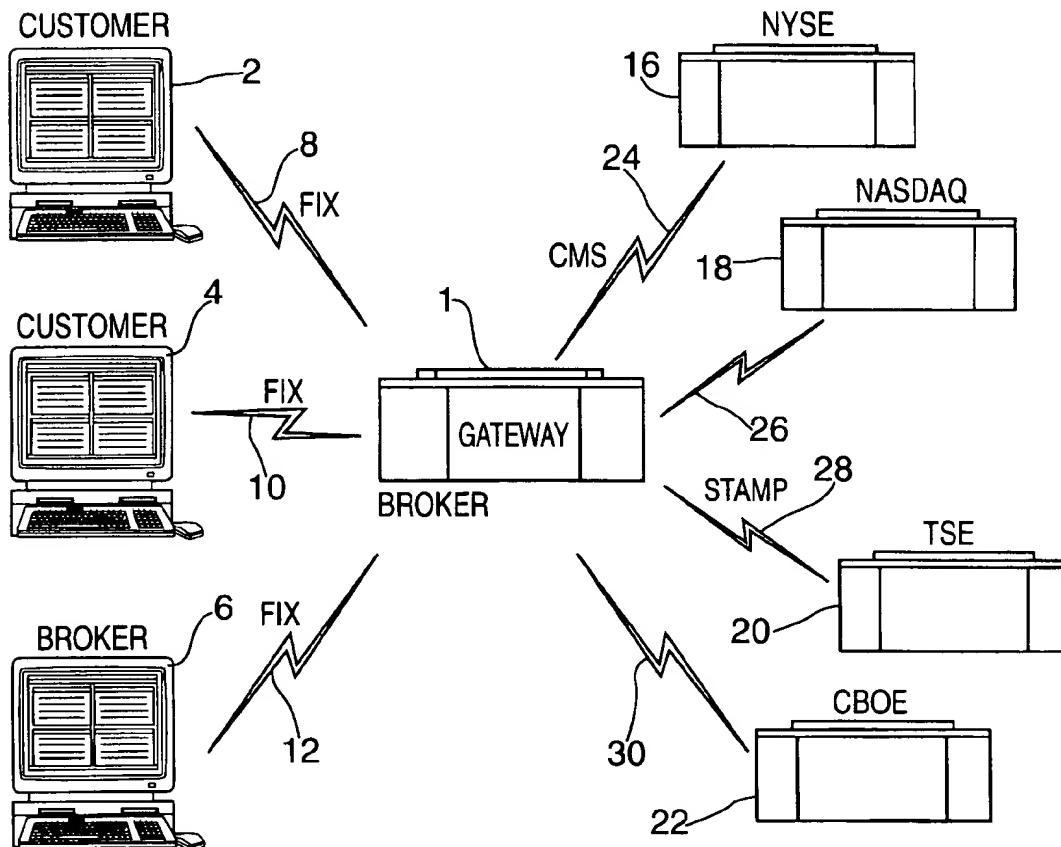
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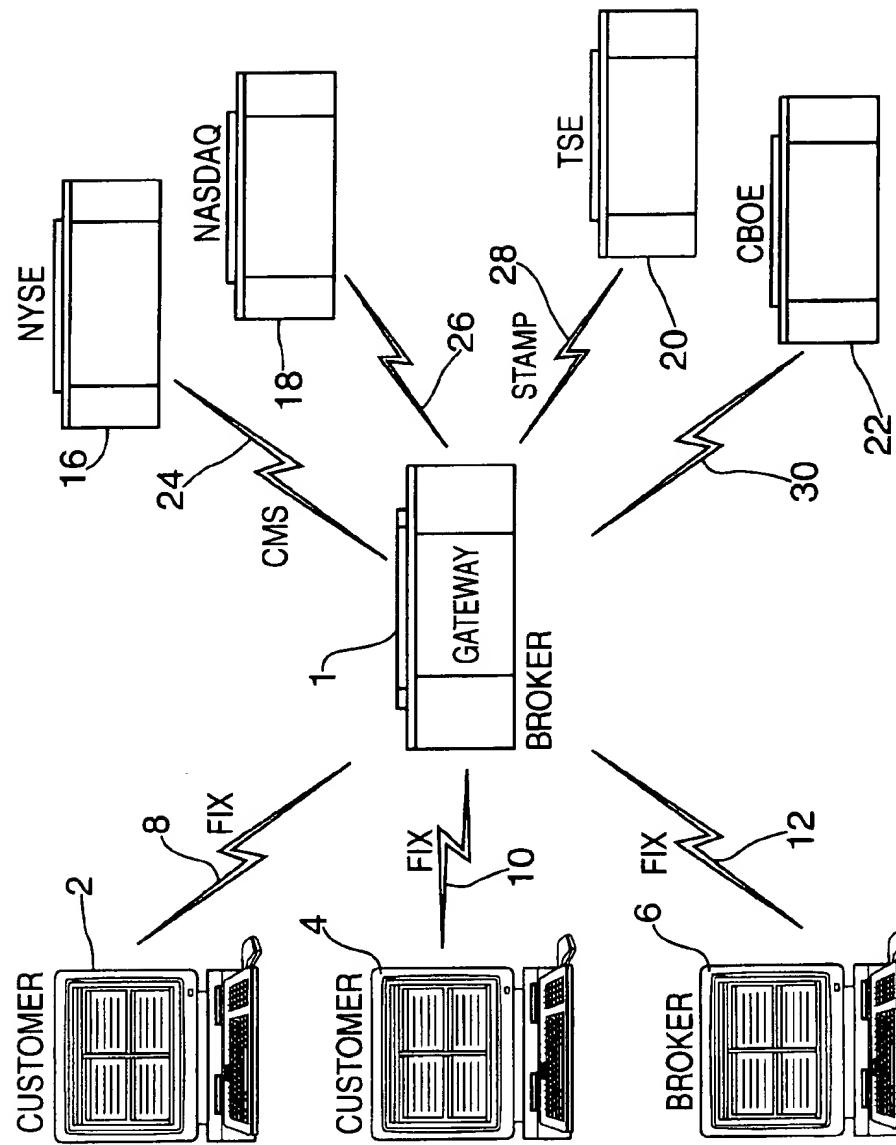
Primary Examiner—Thomas Peeso
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Kenyon & Kenyon

[57] ABSTRACT

In a device and method to provide a gateway for the transfer of information between financial markets and customers, a processor is coupled to a customer system and to a financial market system. The processor receives transaction information from the customer system in a first format, converts it to a second format and transmits the transaction information to the financial market system. The processor receives an acknowledgment and a transaction confirmation from the financial market system in the second format, converts these to the first format and transmits the acknowledgment and the transaction confirmation to the customer system. The processor may also be coupled to a memory, where it stores tracking information relating to the transaction information, the acknowledgment and/or the transaction confirmation.

64 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets





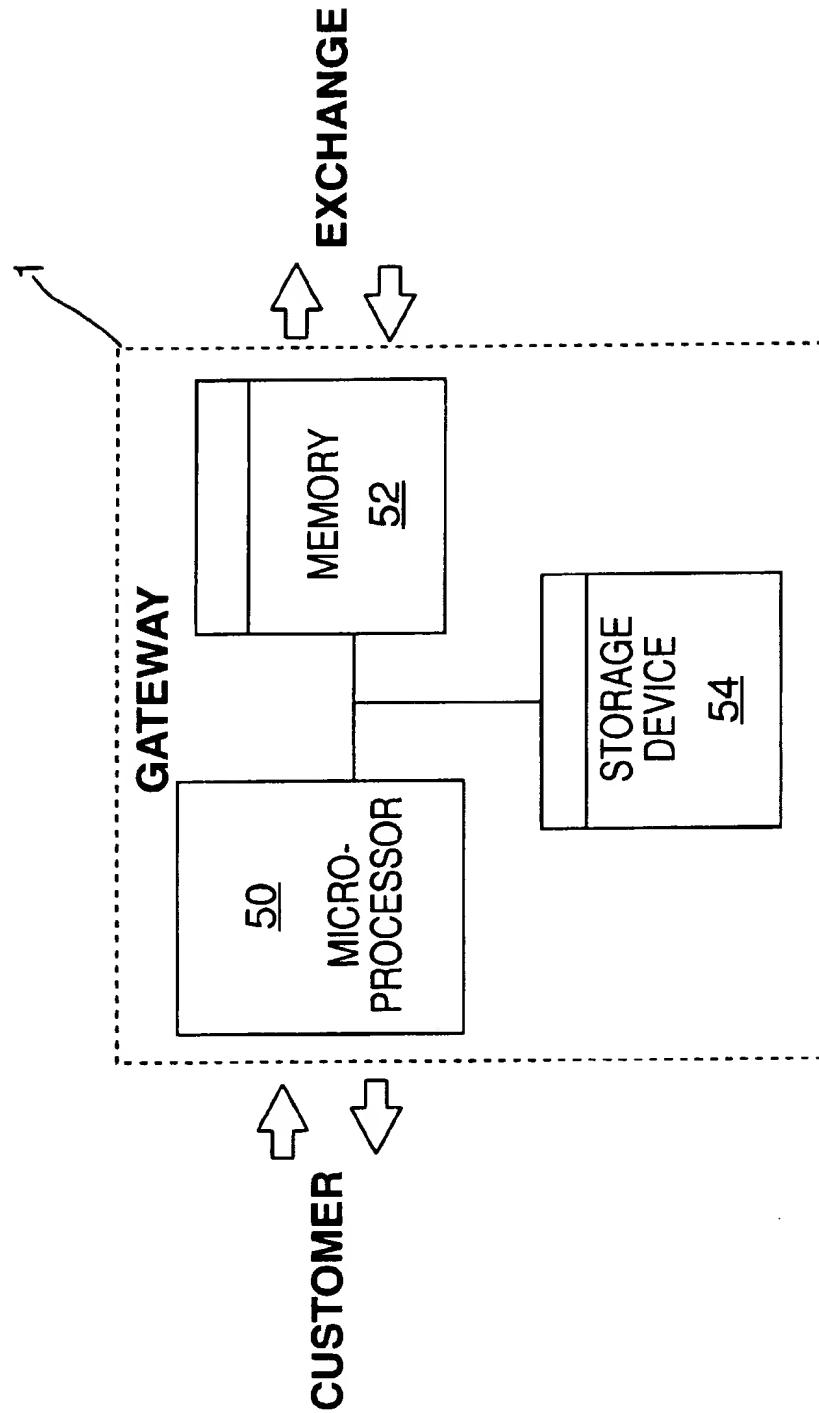


FIG. 2

CUSTOMER SYSTEM X								
TRANSACTION NO.	SYMBOL	TRANSACTION TYPE	QUANTITY	ASK PRICE	EXCHANGE	ACKNOWL	CONFIRM	STATUS # TRADED # REMAINING TRADE PRICE
1	XZY	BUY	100K	\$17	NYSE	YES	YES	FILLED 100K 0 \$17
2	ABC	SELL	200K	\$42	TSE	YES	YES	PARTIAL FILL 150K 50K \$42
3	LVMN	BUY	1K	LAST	OPTIONS	YES	NO	

FIG. 3

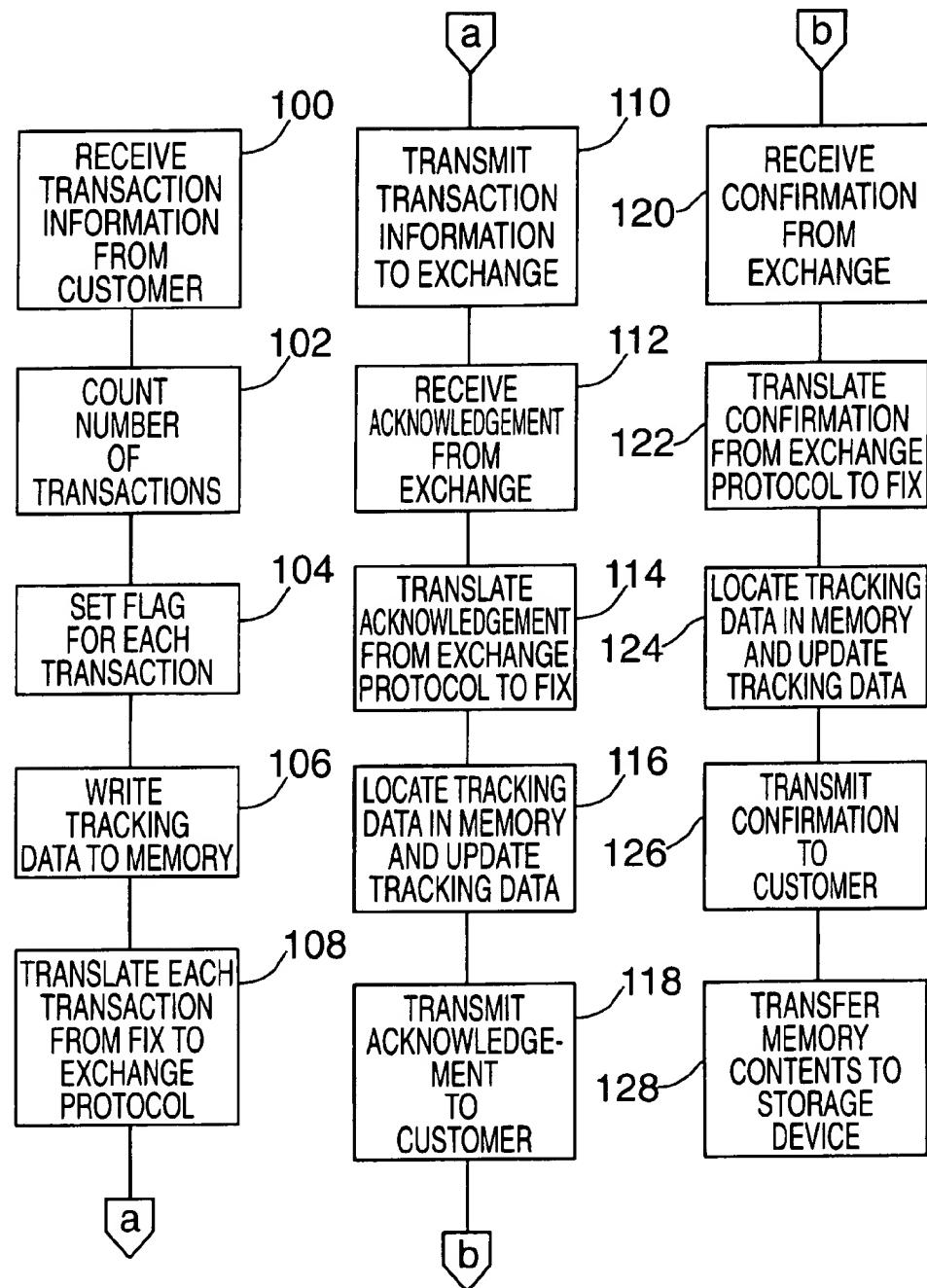


FIG. 4

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AN INFORMATION GATEWAY

FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a system and method for providing a gateway for the transfer of information between financial markets (exchanges) and customers. More specifically, the present invention is directed to a system and method for providing a gateway for the transfer of information between one or more customer system(s) which utilize a common protocol and one or more financial market (exchange) system(s) which utilize the same and/or different protocols that differ from the common protocol.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

To transfer information between two systems, i.e., a customer system and a financial market (exchange) system, that utilize different protocols or languages, it is necessary to manually extract the raw data from the one system and manually enter that data into the other system. Trading interface systems implemented by brokerages utilize such a dual system. One system is used to communicate on the client side for receiving transaction information, e.g., orders, and transmitting transaction information, e.g., acknowledgments, confirmations and historical data. The other system is used to communicate on the market (exchange) side to transmit transaction information, e.g., place orders, and to receive transaction information, e.g., acknowledgments and confirmations.

The current methodology or manual system requires duplication of information entry. Currently, customers who wish to trade (buy and/or sell) financial instruments (i.e., securities, stocks, bonds), currencies, commodities, REITs, options, futures, etc., on financial markets (exchanges) must either communicate directly, e.g., by telephone, with a broker to place an order or be connected to a broker electronically, for example, via computer or terminal. Upon receipt of an order the broker must manually enter the order information for transfer to and execution by the relevant financial market (exchange), e.g., NYSE, NASDAQ, TSE, CBOE, etc.

Once an acknowledgment is received from the relevant financial market (exchange), the broker must then either manually reenter that information for transmission to the customer's computer or terminal, or call the customer and indicate that acknowledgment of the order was received from the relevant financial market (exchange). Upon receipt by the broker of a message from the relevant financial market (exchange) confirming execution, partial execution or non-execution of the order, the broker must then once again either manually reenter that information for transmission to the customer's computer or terminal, or call the customer and indicate that the order was either executed, partially executed or not executed by the relevant financial market (exchange).

Additionally, there are currently markets such as the bond market where trading is not implemented electronically, i.e., there are no computer or other systems linking brokers to their clients or to any markets (exchanges). Thus, in these situations all information must be transferred orally and recorded manually both between the customer and broker and between the broker and the market (exchange).

When using a computer or terminal to communicate between a customer system and a broker system when executing transactions in the equities markets (on the equities exchanges), there is a protocol, the Financial Informa-

tion Exchange (FIX) that has been accepted and implemented by many brokerage houses as a common, standard protocol for all electronic transfers of transaction information. All electronic communications between customers and brokers are formatted according to the FIX protocol.

However, in the equities markets, the various exchanges each utilize proprietary protocols governing communications between the exchange and brokers who are electronically connected to and who transact business on the exchange. For example, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) uses the Common Message Switch (CMS) format, while the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSE) uses the Securities Trading Access Message Protocol (STAMP) format.

Thus, any broker wishing to transmit transaction information, e.g., send a customer's order, to an exchange must take the order received from the customer (i.e., in FIX protocol) and reenter it into the broker's system which interfaces with the relevant exchange (using a different protocol), thereby allowing the order to be understood by the exchange's system.

This is a difficult and time consuming process which is prone to errors since the same information must be manually entered by an operator twice for a transaction to be processed.

There is a need for a system and method whereby a broker can receive transaction information from a customer electronically, e.g., via computer or terminal, and transfer that transaction information electronically to a financial market (exchange) without having to manually reenter the transaction information. Additionally, there is a need for a system and method whereby a broker can receive transaction information, e.g., an acknowledgment and/or a confirmation, from a market (exchange) and transfer that transaction information electronically to a customer, e.g., via computer or terminal, without having to manually reenter the transaction information.

Furthermore, there is a need for a system and method whereby a broker can automatically translate transaction information received electronically from a customer in a certain protocol or language into a protocol or language compatible with the system used by the market (exchange) to which the transaction information is transmitted, and vice versa.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention alleviates these difficulties and solves these problems with a system and method for providing a gateway for the transfer of information between one or more customer system(s) which all utilize a common protocol and one or more financial market (exchange) system(s) which each utilize the same and/or different protocols that differ from the common protocol used by the customer system(s).

The present invention also provides for a system and method whereby a broker can receive transaction information from a customer placed electronically, for example, via computer or terminal, and transmit the transaction information electronically to a financial market (exchange) without the need to manually reenter the transaction information. Additionally, the present invention provides for a system and method whereby a broker can receive transaction information, for example, an acknowledgment and/or a confirmation, electronically from a market (exchange) and transmit that transaction information electronically to a customer, for example, via computer or terminal, without the need to manually reenter the transaction information.

Furthermore, the present invention provides a system and method whereby a broker can automatically translate transaction information received electronically from a customer in a certain protocol or language into a protocol or language compatible with a system used by a financial market (exchange) to which the transaction information is transmitted, and vice versa.

The system according to the present invention includes a gateway which receives and transmits transaction information from/to at least one customer system, receives and transmits transaction information from/to a plurality of markets (exchanges), and translates transaction information from a first protocol, i.e., format and/or language, into at least a second protocol and vice versa.

More specifically, the system according to the present invention includes a gateway which receives transaction information from and transmits transaction information to one or more systems, for example, located at one or more customers and/or one or more brokers, and from/to one or more systems, for example, located at one or more financial markets (exchanges). The transaction information may be transmitted and received by the gateway, by the customer and/or by the financial market (exchange) electronically, or some other way such as via an optical link. Customers and brokers are coupled to the gateway via a customer/gateway interface and financial markets (exchanges) are coupled to the gateway via an exchange/gateway interface.

Transaction information may be entered and/or formatted in any number of different ways, including, for example, in spreadsheet format as a single transaction or a number of transactions, as discrete groups or blocks of information, or directly as individual or single transactions.

The gateway may include components such as, for example, one or more microprocessors, one or more memories, one or more storage devices and one or more I/O devices.

The gateway receives the transaction information and processes the information. The processing may include, for example, separating the information corresponding to each respective transaction, identifying each transaction, formatting the transaction information, and/or translating, i.e., converting or modifying, the information from a protocol, i.e., language and/or format used by the customer/gateway interface into one or more protocols, i.e., languages and/or formats used by the exchange/gateway interface, and vice versa. The gateway may also create a data base including transaction information, store transaction information in memory and/or send transaction information to a storage device.

The present invention may be implemented using any operating system, including, but not limited to Windows NT, Windows 95, UNIX, MAC, etc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a system diagram according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention showing customer/gateway and exchange/gateway interfaces.

FIG. 2 is a system block diagram showing the internal structure of the gateway according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a diagram of a format for tracking data stored in memory as a data base according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram showing the operation of the gateway according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring now to the drawings, and initially FIG. 1, there is illustrated a system diagram according to a first embodiment of the present invention. A gateway 1 which may be located, for example, at a broker's facility, can be implemented using, for example, server class PC, a mainframe computer, a microcomputer, or some other type of processing system. The gateway 1 is coupled to one or more customer system 2, which may be, for example, a microcomputer, mainframe computer or some other type of processing system where a customer may place orders or transact business, via a customer/gateway interface 8 which may include some form of communications link using, for example, electronic or optical transmission of data, and which may be, for example, a modem connection over a telephone line, LAN, WAN, Intranet, Internet, dedicated line, satellite link, optical link or some other type of connection. The gateway 1 may additionally be coupled to other customer system(s) 4 via additional customer/gateway interfaces 10, and/or to broker system(s) 6, e.g., terminal(s) and/or computers, which may be located, for example, at the broker's facility or affiliated facilities, via other customer/gateway interfaces 12, e.g., modem connection over a telephone line, LAN, WAN, dedicated line, satellite link, optical link or some other type of connection. The broker system(s) can be used, for example, on trading desks or by sales people at the broker's facility for placing customer telephone orders or trades for in-house accounts such as mutual funds or hedge funds or for the broker's own account.

All communications between the gateway 1 and the customer systems 2, 4 and/or the broker system(s) 6 occur using a common protocol (format and/or language), for example, Financial Information Exchange (FIX) protocol, which is in the public domain, commonly known and used as a universal trader protocol, and is described in detail in for example, the FIX 4.0 specification and release notes issued by the Fix Technical Committee, Jan. 13, 1996, and available at www.Fixprotocol.org which is incorporated herein by reference.

The gateway 1 is also coupled to one or more financial exchanges 16, 18, 20, 22, for example, NYSE 16, NASDAQ 18, TSE 20, CBOE 22, which may be, for example, a microcomputer, mainframe computer or some other type of processing system, where the exchange may receive and process orders, via an exchange/gateway interface 24, 26, 28, 30 which may include some form of communications link using, for example, electronic or optical transmission of data, and which may be, for example, a modem connection over a telephone line, LAN, WAN, dedicated line, satellite link, optical link or some other type of connection.

The communications between the gateway 1 and each exchange 16, 18, 20, 22 occurs using a proprietary protocol (format and/or language) specific for the relevant exchange. For example, the NYSE 16 uses CMS protocol, and TSE 20 uses STAMP protocol. Thus, any information transmitted from the gateway 1 to the NYSE 16 must be in CMS protocol, while any information transmitted from the gateway 1 to the TSE 20 must be in STAMP protocol.

The gateway 1 serves as the link or interface between the customer systems 2, 4 and/or broker system(s) 6, and the exchanges 16, 18, 20, 22.

Referring now to FIG. 2, there is shown a block diagram of the internal structure of the gateway 1 according to a first embodiment of the present invention. The gateway 1 includes a processor 50, which may be, for example, a microprocessor, a microprocessor array, or a microcomputer.

The processor 50 is coupled to a memory 52, for example a RAM, which is used to store information received from the customer system(s) 2, 4 and/or broker system(s), and from the exchanges 16, 18, 20, 22. The information stored in the memory 52 may include, for example, transaction information, information relating to an order placed by a customer or broker, e.g., stock symbol, quantity, price, exchange, etc., acknowledgment information, and confirmation information. The information stored in memory 52 may be stored, for example, in or as a data base or in any format desired.

The gateway 1 may also include a storage device 54, for example, a RAM, a hard drive, tape drive, ZIP drive, optical drive, holographic storage device, or any other type of storage device, coupled to the processor 50. The storage device 54 may be internal to or physically located within the gateway system or may housed at a remote location. Alternatively, the memory 52 and the storage device 54 may be comprised of a single device. The storage device 54 may be used to store, for example, transaction information, information relating to an order placed by a customer or broker, e.g., financial instrument symbol, quantity, price, exchange, etc., acknowledgment information, and confirmation information. The storage device 54 may be used, for example, as a backup for the memory 52 and/or to archive historical information.

Referring now to FIG. 3, there is shown a diagram of a format for tracking data stored in memory 52 as or in a data base according to a first embodiment of the present invention. The tracking data data base may include a number of lists or fields of information relating to the transactions transmitted to the gateway 1 by a customer system. Column 70 includes a list of the transaction number for each transaction transmitted to the gateway 1. Column 72 includes a list of the symbols for the financial instruments comprising each transaction. Column 74 includes a list of the type of transaction to be implemented, i.e., buy, sell, sell short, etc. Column 76 includes a list of the quantity of the respective financial instrument to be traded. Column 78 includes a list of the price at which the financial instrument should be traded. Column 80 includes a list of the exchange on which the relevant financial instrument is listed. Column 82 includes a list indicating for each transaction whether an acknowledgment has been received. Column 84 includes a list indicating for each transaction whether a confirmation has been received. Column 86 includes a list indicating status of the order, i.e., rejected, accepted, filled, partially filled, etc. Column 88 includes a list indicating the quantity of the financial instrument traded for each transaction. Column 90 includes a list indicating the number of financial instruments outstanding or remaining for each requested transaction. Column 92 includes a list indicating the price at which each unit was traded.

Alternatively, the data base may include fewer or more columns than those indicated and various columns may be combined or divided as desired. Additionally, the information may be stored in some other manner besides as a data base, including but not limited to being coded, stored as a data word, as compressed data, etc.

The data rates at the customer/gateway interfaces 8, 10 and/or 12 (as shown in FIG. 1) are approximately the same since they use a common protocol. The data rate between customer system(s) 2, 4 and/or broker system(s) 6, and the gateway 1 can be, for example, 56 Kbps. Alternatively, the data rates at customer/gateway interfaces 8, 10 and/or 12 may vary. The data rates between the gateway 1 and the exchanges at exchange/gateway interface 24, 26, 28, 30 may

be similar or may vary, and can be, for example, 9600 bps. Whatever data rates are used, the memory 52 should be of sufficient capacity to store all received information without losing or over-writing any data.

Because of the differences in data rates between the customer/gateway interfaces and the exchange/gateway interface, the memory 52 may also be used as a buffer to store any transaction information that may accumulate while waiting to be transmitted to the exchanges, or to customers/brokers. Alternatively, a separate memory may be used to buffer this transaction information.

Communications between the gateway 1 and customer system(s) 2, 4 and broker system(s) 6 may also include some form of security such as, for example, coding of information, time offsets and password protection, to insure the integrity and secrecy of the information being transmitted.

The gateway 1 processes information, for example, by using one or more programs running one or more threads of execution (i.e., sharing resources) or by using multiple programs, such that multiple pieces of information may be processed at the same time. The gateway 1 is, therefore, able to communicate with multiple customer system(s) 2, 4 and/or broker system(s) 6, and with multiple exchanges 16, 18, 20, 22 simultaneously. Each customer system and/or broker system that transmits information, i.e., an order, to the gateway 1 is allocated a separate thread, i.e., a separate flag is set, and a separate program is invoked to process the information from that customer system and/or broker system.

The operation of the gateway, including processing of information can be understood more readily by referring to FIG. 4, which is a flow diagram of the gateway operation according to a first embodiment of the present invention. In step 100 transaction information, e.g., an order, is received from a customer system 2 by the gateway 1 in an common protocol such as, for example, FIX protocol. The order is processed in steps 102, 104, 106 and 108. Because an order may include one or more transactions such as, for example, buying and/or selling equities, buying and/or selling futures, buying and/or selling bonds, buying and/or selling options, etc., the processing should include a counting step 102 where the number of transactions is determined. The processing also includes a step 104 where flags are set for each separate transaction. There may be an additional step (not shown) where the information is provided with some form of coding or identification so that the processor can identify and match the information transmitted to the exchange system (i.e., transaction information) with the information received from the exchange system (i.e., acknowledgment and confirmation information).

The processing further includes a step 106 where tracking data relating to each transaction is written to a location, for example, in memory 52 so that the gateway may keep track of each transaction. The tracking data may be written, for example, in the form of a data base, and may include information such as, for example, described above in relation to FIG. 3. Each transaction is then translated in step 108 from FIX protocol into the proper protocol for the exchange to which it is to be transmitted.

For example, if the gateway 1 receives an order from a customer system 2 containing three transactions (as shown in FIG. 3), i.e., (1) purchase 100,000 shares of XYZ stock on the NYSE at \$17/share, (2) sell 200,000 shares of ABC stock on the TSE at \$42/share, and (3) buy 1000 July put options for LMN stock at last asking price, the gateway 1 will count the number of transactions and set flags for each, i.e., three

flags. The gateway 1 will also write tracking data relating to each of the three transactions into memory. The gateway 1 will then begin translating the first transaction from FIX protocol into CMS protocol, the second transaction from FIX protocol into STAMP protocol, and the third transaction from FIX protocol into the proper protocol for the relevant options exchange.

The gateway 1 may run a separate sub-program for processing (including translation) for each customer, or may otherwise process transactions for each customer individually. The processing of transactions for each customer may occur simultaneously or consecutively since the gateway 1 is capable of parallel processing, i.e., processing for each customer simultaneously.

Alternatively, the processing may include only some of the steps discussed above or it may include additional steps such as, for example, error correction, data compression, etc.

When the processing of a transaction received from a customer system is completed, in step 110 the gateway 1 transmits the translated (reformatted) transaction information to the proper exchange. The gateway 1 then receives an acknowledgment from the exchange, in step 112, indicating that the transaction information has been received. The gateway processes the acknowledgment in steps 114, 116 and 118. In step 114 the gateway 1 translates the acknowledgment from the exchange's protocol into a common protocol such as, for example, FIX protocol. In step 116 the gateway locates the tracking data in memory 52 relating to the relevant transaction and updates the tracking data in memory 52. In step 118 the gateway 1 transmits the acknowledgment information to the customer system 2.

Some time after the acknowledgment is received by the gateway 1, in step 120 the gateway 1 receives a transaction confirmation from the relevant exchange. The transaction confirmation indicates the status of the transaction and may include information such as, for example, financial instrument symbol, order accepted and filled/partially filled or rejected, quantity, price, etc.

The gateway processes the transaction confirmation in steps 122, 124 and 126. In step 122 the gateway 1 translates the transaction confirmation from the exchange's protocol into a common protocol such as, for example, FIX protocol. In step 124 the gateway locates the tracking data in memory 52 relating to the relevant transaction and updates the tracking data in memory 52. In step 126 the gateway 1 transmits the transaction confirmation to the customer system 2.

In step 128 the gateway transfers the contents of memory 52 relating to transactions for which transaction confirmations have been received into storage device 54. The storage device 54 may be accessed by the customer system(s) 2, 4 and the broker system(s) 6, and by the broker. Safety features in the gateway 1 only allow a customer system/broker system access to the transactions placed by that customer system/broker system.

The system can accommodate and support any number of customers and/or brokers as well as any number of financial markets (exchanges).

What is claimed is:

1. A device for providing an information gateway between a customer and a financial market comprising:
a processor coupled to a customer system, and coupled to a financial market system, the processor programmed to:
receive a first group of data from the customer system,
receive a second group of data from the financial market system,

convert the first group of data into a third group of data, convert the second group of data into a fourth group of data,

transmit the third group of data to the financial market system, and
transmit the fourth group of data to the customer system; and

a memory coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit a fifth group of data to the memory.

2. The device according to claim 1, wherein the fifth group of data relates to the first group of data and to the fourth group of data.

3. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit the fifth group of data to the storage device.

4. The device according to claim 1, wherein the first and fourth group of data are in a first format.

5. The device according to claim 1, wherein the second and third group of data are in a second format.

6. The device according to claim 4, wherein the first format is FIX protocol.

7. The device according to claim 1, wherein the first group of data, the second group of data, the third group of data and the fourth group of data are received and transmitted electronically.

8. The device according to claim 1, wherein the first group of data, the second group of data, the third group of data and the fourth group of data are received and transmitted optically.

9. The device according to claim 1, wherein the first group of data and the fourth group of data include transaction information.

10. The device according to claim 9, wherein the transaction information includes information relating to a plurality of transactions.

11. The device according to claim 1, wherein the second group of data and the third group of data include at least one group of acknowledgment information and confirmation information.

12. The device according to claim 1, wherein the processor is coupled to a plurality of customer systems and the processor programmed to receive at least one first group of data from each of the plurality of customer systems, and wherein each of the at least one first groups of data are in the first format.

13. The device according to claim 1, wherein the fifth group of data is stored in memory in a data base.

14. The device according to claim 1, wherein the fifth group of data includes tracking information.

15. A device for providing an information gateway between at least one customer and a plurality of financial markets comprising:

a processor coupled to at least one customer system, and coupled to a plurality of financial market systems, the processor programmed to:
receive at least one first group of data from the at least one customer system,
receive at least one second group of data from at least one of the plurality of financial market systems,
convert the at least one first group of data into at least one third group of data,
convert the at least one second group of data into at least one fourth group of data,
transmit the at least one third group of data to at least one of the plurality of financial market systems, and

- transmit the at least one fourth group of data to the at least one customer system; and
- a memory coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit at least one fifth group of data to the memory.
16. The device according to claim 15, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit the at least one fifth group of data to the storage device.
17. The device according to claim 15, wherein the processor is coupled to a plurality of customer systems and the processor programmed to receive at least one first group of data from each of the plurality of customer systems, and wherein each of the at least one first groups of data are in the first format.
18. A device for providing an information gateway comprising:
- a processor coupled to at least one first system, and coupled to at least one second system, the processor programmed to:
 - receive at least one first group of data from the at least one first system in a first format,
 - receive at least one second group of data from the at least one second system in a second format,
 - convert the at least one first group of data from the first format into the second format,
 - convert the at least one second group of data from the second format into the first format,
 - transmit the at least one first group of data to the at least one second system in the second format,
 - transmit the at least one second group of data to the at least one first system in the first format.
19. The device according to claim 18, further comprising a memory coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit at least one third group of data to the memory.
20. The device according to claim 19, wherein the third group of data relates to the first group of data and to the second group of data.
21. The device according to claim 19, wherein the third group of data is stored in memory in a data base.
22. The device according to claim 19, wherein the third group of data includes tracking information.
23. The device according to claim 18, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit the third group of data to the storage device.
24. The device according to claim 23, wherein the storage device is a tape drive.
25. The device according to claim 18, wherein the first protocol is FIX protocol.
26. The device according to claim 18, wherein the at least one first group of data and the at least one second group of data are received and transmitted electronically.
27. The device according to claim 18, wherein the at least one first group of data and the at least one second group of data are received and transmitted optically.
28. The device according to claim 18, wherein the at least one first group of data includes transaction information.
29. The device according to claim 26, wherein the first group of data includes information relating to a plurality of transactions.
30. The device according to claim 18, wherein the at least one second group of data includes at least one of acknowledgment information and confirmation information.
31. The device according to claim 18, wherein the processor is coupled to a plurality of first systems and a plurality of second systems, and the processor programmed to receive at least one first group of data from each of the plurality of first systems, and wherein each of the at least one first groups of data are in the first format (protocol).
32. The device according to claim 18, wherein the at least one first system is a customer system and the at least one second system is a financial market system.
33. A method for providing an information gateway between a customer and a financial market comprising the steps of:
- receiving a first group of data from a customer system;
 - receiving a second group of data from a financial market system;
 - converting the first group of data into a third group of data;
 - converting the second group of data into a fourth group of data;
 - transmitting the third group of data to the financial market system;
 - transmitting the fourth group of data to the customer system;
 - transmitting a fifth group of data to a memory.
34. The method according to claim 33, wherein the fifth group of data relates to the first group of data and to the fourth group of data.
35. The method according to claim 33, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit the fifth group of data to the storage device.
36. The method according to claim 33, wherein the first and fourth group of data are in a first format.
37. The method according to claim 33, wherein the second and third group of data are in a second format.
38. The method according to claim 36, wherein the first format is FIX protocol.
39. The method according to claim 33, wherein the first group of data, the second group of data, the third group of data and the fourth group of data are received and transmitted electronically.
40. The method according to claim 33, wherein the first group of data, the second group of data, the third group of data and the fourth group of data are received and transmitted optically.
41. The method according to claim 33, wherein the first group of data and the fourth group of data include transaction information.
42. The method according to claim 41, wherein the transaction information includes information relating to a plurality of transactions.
43. The method according to claim 33, wherein the second group of data and the third group of data include at least one of acknowledgment information and confirmation information.
44. The method according to claim 33, wherein a first group of data is received from each of a plurality of customer systems, and a second group of data is received from each of a plurality of financial market system.
45. The method according to claim 33, wherein the fifth group of data is stored in memory in a data base.
46. The method according to claim 33, wherein the fifth group of data includes tracking information.
47. A method for providing an information gateway between at least one customer and a plurality of financial markets comprising the steps of:
- receiving at least one first group of data from at least one customer system in a first format;

receiving at least one second group of data from at least one of a plurality of financial market systems in a second format;

converting the at least one first group of data from the first format into the second format;

converting the at least one second group of data from the second format into the first format;

transmitting the at least one first group of data to at least one of the plurality of financial market systems in the second format;

transmitting the at least one second group of data to the at least one customer system in the first format; and

transmitting at least one third group of data to a memory.

48. The method according to claim 47, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit the at least one fifth group of data to the storage device.

49. The method according to claim 47, wherein a first group of data is received from each of a plurality of 20 customer systems in the first format.

50. A method for providing an information gateway comprising the steps of:

receiving at least one first group of data from at least one first system in a first format;

receiving at least one second group of data from at least one second system in a second format;

converting the at least one first group of data from the first format into the second format;

converting the at least one second group of data from the second format into the first format;

transmitting the at least one first group of data to the at least one second system in the second format; and

transmitting the at least one second group of data to the at least one first system in the first format.

51. The method according to claim 50, further comprising the step of transmitting at least one third group of data to a memory.

52. The method according to claim 51, wherein the third group of data relates to the first group of data and to the second group of data.

53. The method according to claim 51, wherein the third group of data is stored in memory in a data base.

54. The method according to claim 51, wherein the third group of data includes tracking information.

55. The method according to claim 50, further comprising a storage device coupled to the processor, the processor programmed to transmit a third group of data to the storage device.

56. The method according to claim 55, wherein the storage device is a tape drive.

57. The method according to claim 50, wherein the first protocol is FIX protocol.

58. The method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one first group of data and the at least one second group of data are received and transmitted electronically.

59. The method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one first group of data and the at least one second group of data are received and transmitted optically.

60. The method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one first group of data includes transaction information.

61. The method according to claim 60, wherein the first group of data includes information relating to a plurality of transactions.

62. The method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one second group of data includes at least one of acknowledgement information and confirmation information.

63. The method according to claim 50, wherein a first group of data is received from each of a plurality of first systems, and a second group of data is received from each of a plurality of second systems.

64. The method according to claim 50, wherein the at least one first system is a customer system and the at least one second system is a financial market system.

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